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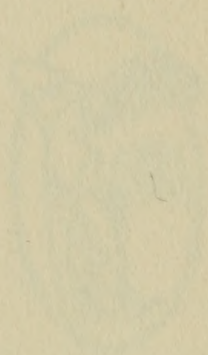
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1900

MADemoiselle DE MAUPIN

BY

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER



*"With the wind of God in her
vesture, proclaiming the deathless,
ever-soaring spirit of man."—Locke*

J. H. SEARS & COMPANY, INC.
PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK



Set up, Printed and Bound at the
KINGSPORT PRESS
KINGSPORT TENNESSEE
United States of America

MADemoiselle DE MAUPIN

CHAPTER I

YOU complain, old friend, of the rarity of my letters. What would you have me tell you, besides the fact that I am in good health, and that I still have the same affection for you? These are facts you know perfectly well, and they are so natural to my own age and the fine qualities you possess that it seems almost ridiculous to make a miserable bit of paper travel a hundred miles to convey nothing more. I have sought in vain, for I have nothing worth telling; my life is the most uninteresting in the world, and nothing occurs to break its monotony. To-day introduces to-morrow, just as yesterday ushered in to-day; and without being so fatuous as to call myself a prophet, I can safely predict in the morning all that will happen to me in the evening.

I spend my day like this: I get up, that being the indispensable commencement of every day; I breakfast, exercise, go out, return home, dine, pay a few calls or do a little reading; then I retire to rest precisely as I did the night before; I go to sleep, and my imagination, not being excited by fresh objects, merely furnishes me with dreams as hackneyed and monotonous as my real life. That is not very amusing, you will observe. But I am accommodating myself better to this sort of existence than I should have done six months ago. I am bored, it is true, but in a tranquil and resigned fashion not entirely lacking in sweetness, and comparable in some respects to those warm and pallid autumn days in which we find a secret charm after the summer's excessive heat.

This life, although I have in appearance accepted it, is scarcely made for me, or at least is very far from resembling the existence of which I dream, and for which I feel myself designed. Perhaps I am mistaken, and am only fit for such a life; but it is difficult for me to come to that conclusion, for if it were my real destiny I should more easily fit into it, nor should I have been sorely wounded by its corners in so many places.

You know what an all-powerful attraction unusual adventures have for me, how I adore anything strange, excessive, or dangerous, and with what avidity I devour novels and stories of travel; perhaps there is not upon the earth a wilder or more vagrant fantasy than mine. Ah well, I know not by what fatality that comes about, for I have never had an adventure, nor have I ever made a journey. For me, the circumnavigation of the world is the tour of the town in which I dwell; I touch my horizon on every side; I jostle with reality. My life is that of the shell-fish on the sand-bank, of the ivy around the tree, of the cricket on the hearth. Truly I am astonished that my feet have not yet taken root.

Love is painted with a bandage over the eyes; Destiny instead should be pictured like that.

I have as my servant a dull, stupid peasant, who has traveled as far as the North Wind; he has been to the Devil, and I don't know where besides; he has seen with his eyes the things of which I form such beautiful ideas, and he takes as much account of them as of a glass of water; he has found himself in the strangest of places, he has experienced the most astonishing adventures it is possible to have. I sometimes make him talk, and I become enraged at the thought that all these fine things have happened to a booby, who is incapable of either feeling or reflection, and who is good for nothing but his own duties, the brushing of clothes and cleaning of boots.

It is clear that this rascal's life ought to have been mine. On his part, he thinks I should be very happy, and displays the greatest astonishment at seeing how sad I am.

All this is not very interesting, poor friend, and is hardly worth the trouble of writing, is it? But, as you absolutely

desire me to write to you, I must tell you my thoughts and impressions, and give you the history of my ideas for lack of events or actions to narrate. There will not, perhaps, be much novelty or continuity in what I have to tell; but for that you must blame yourself. You have asked for it.

You are the friend of my youth, I was brought up with you; for a long while we lived the same life, and we are used to the exchange of our inmost thoughts. I can therefore tell you, without blushing, all the nonsense which enters my empty head; I will not add a word, I will not keep back a word, for I have no self-respect where you are concerned. I shall be absolutely exact, even in trifling and not very creditable matters; for certainly you are not the person from whom I ought to conceal my feelings.

Beneath that shroud of nonchalant and depressed boredom of which I spoke to you just now there sometimes moves a thought which is rather torpid than dead, and I have not always that feeling of sweet, sad calm which produces melancholy. I have relapses into my former state of mental disturbance. Nothing in the world is so fatiguing as these motiveless whirlwinds and endless impulses of the mind. On days like these, although I have no more to do than on other days, I rise very early, before sunrise, so busy do I seem to be and without the necessary time at my disposal; I dress myself in great haste, as if the house were on fire, putting on my clothes haphazard and grieving over a minute wasted. Any one who saw me would think that I was going to a lover's rendezvous or on a search for gold. Not at all. I do not even know where I am going, but I must go, and I should consider my safety compromised were I to remain. I seem to hear some one calling me from outside, to see my destiny passing in the street at that moment, and to realize that the question of my life is about to be decided.

I go out with a surprised and bewildered air, my clothing in disorder and my hair badly arranged; the passers-by turn and laugh as they proceed, thinking that I am a young rake who has passed the night at his club or elsewhere. I am, in fact, intoxicated, although I have drunk nothing, and I display all the symptoms, even to an uncertain walk, some-

times slow, sometimes fast. I go from street to street like a dog that has lost its master, looking everywhere, very anxious and wide awake, turning round at the slightest sound, gliding into every group, without noticing the rebuffs of the people I jostle, and staring all about with a clearness of vision I do not possess at other times. Then suddenly it is made clear to me that I am mistaken, that I must go further afield, the other end of the town perhaps. Once more I start off as if the Devil himself were after me. I touch the ground only with the tips of my toes, and do not weigh an ounce. I must indeed look strange with my furious and bewildered expression, and my waving arms as I utter inarticulate cries. When I think of it all in cold blood I laugh heartily in my own face, but please believe that does not prevent me from doing it again on the next occasion.

If I were asked the reason of my rushing hither and thither in this fashion, I should certainly be very puzzled to give an answer. I am not in haste to reach my destination, as I have none. I am not afraid of being late, as I have no appointment to keep. Nobody expects me, nor have I any reason to hasten.

Is it a love affair, an adventure, a woman, an idea, or a fortune, a something lacking in my own life, which I am unwittingly seeking, urged on by a dim instinct? Is it my own existence which desires to be completed? Is it a longing to leave my home and change my personality, or ennui at my own position and desire for a change? It is something of all that, perhaps all of it together. Still it is always a very unpleasant state of mind, a febrile irritation which is usually succeeded by the most languid debility.

I often have the impression that if I had started an hour earlier, or doubled my speed, I should have arrived in time; or that while I traversed one street, the person I sought passed along the next, and that a block in the traffic had sufficed to make my pursuit futile. You cannot imagine into what sorrow and despair I sink when I see that it all ends in failure, that my youth is passing without any perspective opening up before me; then all my disengaged passions mutter sullenly in my heart, and, lacking other food, devour each other like the animals of a menagerie when their keeper has forgotten

to feed them. In spite of my daily suppressed disappointments, there is something in me which resists and does not wish to die. I have no hope, for to hope a desire is needed, as well as a certain propensity to wish events to shape themselves in one way rather than another. I do not desire anything, for I desire everything; I do not hope, or rather I have ceased to hope; it is absolutely the same to me whether a thing is or is not. I wait for—what? I do not know, but I still expect.

Mine is a fluttering state of expectancy, full of impatience, interrupted by starts and nervous motions, like the condition of a lover waiting for his mistress. Nothing happens; I return home in a rage or burst into tears. I am waiting for the heavens to open, for an angel to descend and make a revelation to me that a revolution is in progress and offers me a throne, that a Raphael virgin is stepping out of her canvas and coming to embrace me, that relations of mine—who do not exist—have died and left me wealth enough to float my fantasies upon a river of gold, or that a hippogriff has seized me and borne me away to an unknown land. But whatever it is I expect, it is most certainly nothing ordinary or usual.

This feeling even goes so far that, when I return home, I never fail to say, "Has any one been here? Is there any letter for me, or anything fresh?" I know perfectly well there is nothing, there can be nothing. All the same, I am still very surprised and disappointed when I receive the usual answer: "No, sir, absolutely nothing."

Sometimes, on rare occasions, the idea is more precise. It becomes condensed into a beautiful woman, whom I do not know, and who does not know me, though we have met at the theater or in church, where she may not have taken the least bit of notice of me. I traverse the whole house, and till I have opened the door of the last room—I dare hardly tell you this, so mad does it seem—I hope she has come, and is there. It is not conceit on my part. I am so little self-conscious that several women are very favorably disposed towards me, so I hear from others, women whom I consid-

ered quite indifferent to me, and never particularly impressed with my conversation.

When I am not stupefied by ennui and discouragement, my soul awakens and resumes all its former vigor. I hope, love, desire, and my desires are so violent that I think they must attract like a magnet of great power. That is why I await the things I desire, instead of going to seek them, and I often enough neglect facilities which seem favorable to my hopes. Another person would write a loving note to the divinity of his heart, or seek an opportunity to approach her. I ask the messenger for an answer to a letter I have not written, and spend my time in creating in my head the most wonderful situations in which to present myself to the woman I love in the most unusual and favorable light. The plans I devise for introducing myself to her and laying bare my passion would make a larger and more ingenious book than the stratagems of Polybius. It would often suffice for me to say to one of my friends, "Present me to that lady," and then complete the acquaintance with a mythological compliment punctuated with glances.

After hearing all this, you will think me a suitable subject for restraint; I am, however, a reasonable enough fellow, and I have not converted many of my foolish ideas into actions. All that takes place in the hollow of my mind, and all these absurd ideas are very carefully hidden away; from outside nothing is visible, and I have the reputation of being a cool and quiet young man, not fond of women, and indifferent to the pleasures of my age; now this reputation is as far from the truth as are usually the judgments of the world.

But, in spite of all my rebuffs, some of my desires have been realized, and from the small amount of joy their accomplishment has caused me, I have come to fear the realization of the others. You remember the childish ardor with which I desired to possess a horse of my own? Just lately my mother has given me one. He is black as ebony with a little white star on his forehead, a mane, shining coat, and fine limbs, just as I desired. When I first received him I had such a shock that for a quarter of an hour I was quite pale; then I mounted, and without saying a word, I went for a good gallop across

country, which lasted more than an hour, in a state of rapture hard to imagine. I did the same every day for more than a week, and I really do not know how I failed to lame or break him down. But bit by bit my eagerness abated. I trotted my horse, then walked him, and then I got to ride him so nonchalantly that he often stopped without my noticing it; pleasure became converted into habit much more quickly than I could have believed possible. As for Farragus, that is the name I gave him, he is the most charming animal in the world, fleet as a stag and gentle as a lamb. You shall have the pleasure of a gallop on him when you come here. And although my passion for riding has decreased, I am still very fond of him, for he is a horse of a fine disposition, and I infinitely prefer him to most people. If you knew how joyfully he neighs when I go to see him in his stable and with what intelligent eyes he looks at me! I admit that I am touched by these marks of affection, and I put my arms round his neck and kiss him as tenderly as if he were a beautiful girl.

I had, too, another desire, more keen, burning, ever present, and cherished, upon which, in my soul, I had built a delightful castle of cards and palace of fancies, one often destroyed, but always rebuilt with despairing persistence. It was a desire to have a mistress, a mistress quite my own, like the horse. I do not know if the realization of this dream would have as promptly found me cold as did the realization of the other; I doubt it. But perhaps I am wrong, and should have quickly wearied of her. Through my curious disposition, I desire so frantically what I do desire, without doing anything to procure it, that if by chance, or in any other way, I attain my object, I have so great a moral lassitude, and am so harassed, that I suffer from exhaustion, and have no longer the strength to enjoy it. So things which come to me without any longing on my part for them usually give me more pleasure than those I have most earnestly desired.

I am twenty-two; I am not an innocent. Alas! nobody is nowadays at that age, either in body or in heart, which is worse. Besides those women who provide pleasure for payment, and who no more count than an evil dream, I have

enjoyed here and there, in some out-of-the-way spot or another, a few honest, or very nearly honest women, neither beautiful nor ugly, neither young nor old, taking advantage of the opportunities which present themselves to easy-going young fellows whose hearts are free. With a little goodwill and a large dose of romantic illusions, a fellow calls one of them a mistress if he pleases. But in my case that is impossible, for I might have a thousand of that sort, and I should still consider my desire as far from fulfillment as ever.

I have not yet had a mistress, and my great desire is to have one. It is an idea which strangely worries me! it is neither the effervescence of temperament, hot blood, nor the first burst of puberty. It is not the woman I desire, it is a woman, a mistress. I desire one and I will have one; if I do not succeed, I must admit, my failure will have a discouraging influence on the rest of my life. I should consider myself a failure in one direction, incomplete, and deformed in mind or heart; for my demand is a just one, and nature owes it to every man. If I were not to succeed in my object, I should look upon myself as a child, and I should lack the self-confidence I ought to possess. A mistress to me is the same thing as the *toga virilis* was to a young Roman.

I see so many men, who are ignoble in every respect, with beautiful wives whose lackeys they are hardly worthy to be, that a blush mounts to my cheek for them, and also for myself. It gives me a contemptible opinion of women, to see them infatuated with cads who despise and deceive them, rather than give themselves to some sincere and loyal young fellow, who would consider himself very fortunate, and adore them on his bended knees—myself, for example. It is quite true that the former are the men who haunt drawing-rooms, strut about or loll over the back of a couch, while I stay indoors with my forehead against the window-pane, watching the mist rise from the river, as I silently raise up in my heart the perfumed sanctuary, the marvelous temple in which lodge the future idol of my soul. It is a chaste and poetic occupation, but one for which women have the least possible liking.

Women have very little taste for the contemplative and a singular regard for those who turn their ideas into actions. After all, they are not far wrong. Obligated by their education and social position to keep silent and wait, they naturally prefer men who come to them and speak, for they rescue them from a false and awkward position. I see all that; but never in my life could I take upon myself, as I see many men do, to get up from my seat, walk across a drawing-room, go up suddenly to a woman and say, "Your dress is quite angelic," or "Your eyes are wonderfully bright to-night."

But all that does not alter the fact that a mistress is necessary to me. I do not know who she is to be, but I do not see, among the women I know, one who could properly fill that dignified position. In them I find only too few of the qualities I require. Those who are young enough are neither sufficiently beautiful nor accomplished; those who are young and beautiful are ignoble and repulsive in their vice, or else lack the necessary liberty; and then there is always some brother, some husband, or some aunt with large eyes and ears, to be coaxed or thrown out of the window. Every rose has its thorn, every woman her crowd of relatives to be cleared away, if a man desires one day to pluck the fruit of her beauty. Even the second cousins in the country, whom one has never seen, wish to maintain, in all its whiteness, the immaculate purity of their dear cousin. That is nauseous, and I should never have the patience necessary to uproot all the weeds and cut away all the briars which fatally obstruct the approaches to a pretty woman.

I do not like mothers, and I like little girls less. I must also admit that married women have only a very mild attraction for me. There is something revolting to me in a love affair with a woman who has a husband. The woman who has a husband and a lover is a courtesan to one of the two, and often to both; and besides, I could not consent to yield my place to another. My natural pride would not know how to bow to such humiliation. I would never go because another man was expected. Even were the woman to be compromised and lost, and the two men to fight with knives, each

with a foot upon her body, I would remain. Secret stairs, wardrobes, closets, and all the appliances of adultery would be a poor expedient to me.

I am very little attracted by what is called virgin candor, innocence, purity of heart, and the other charming things which have such a beautiful effect in verse; I call all that nonsense, ignorance, imbecility, or hypocrisy. That virgin candor which consists of sitting on the edge of a couch with the arms pressed against the body, the eye upon the point of the corset, and speaking only after obtaining permission from grandparents; the innocence which has the monopoly of straight hair and white dresses, the pureness of heart which wears high corsages because the beauty of the neck and shoulders is not yet developed, do not really give me great pleasure.

I do not care for them sufficiently to spell the alphabet of love to the little simpletons. I am neither old enough nor corrupt enough to take much pleasure in them; besides, I should meet with very little success, for I have never been able to expound a subject, even one with which I am well acquainted, to any one. I prefer women who read fluently, for then the end of the chapter is reached all the more quickly; and in all things, in love most of all, the end is the thing most worthy of consideration. In this respect I am something like those people who read a book backwards, turning first of all to the end, and then, if necessary, going back to the beginning. This fashion of reading and loving has its charm. The reader enjoys details better when his mind is easy as to the end of the story; reversing the order leads to the unexpected.

Now little girls and married women have been excluded from the category. Therefore, our divinity must be selected from among the widows. Alas! I am very much afraid, although it is the last resort, that I shall not yet find what I seek among them.

If I were to love one of those pale narcissi, bathed in a warm dew of tears, who lean with melancholy grace upon the new marble tomb of a husband happily and recently deceased, I should most certainly and in a very short time be as un-

happy as the defunct spouse in his lifetime. Widows, however young and charming they may be, have one great drawback which other wives have not. Should any small cloud appear in the sky of love, they tell you at once, with a superlatively contemptuous air: "Ah, to-day you are just like my late husband used to be; when we quarreled he used to say just the same; it is very strange that you should have a similar tone in your voice and the same look; when you lose your temper you would not believe how you resemble my late husband; there is quite a terrifying likeness." That is a pleasant sort of thing to be told to one's face! There are some even who extend their impudence as far as to praise the departed in the manner of an epitaph, and to extol his heart and limbs at the expense of your own. At least, in the case of wives who have only had one or several lovers, a husband has the inestimable advantage of never hearing his predecessor mentioned, and that is no slight consideration. Women have too great a regard for the proprieties not to remain scrupulously silent under such circumstances, and all such affairs are relegated to obscurity as soon as possible. It is quite understood that a man is always a woman's first lover.

I do not think that there is any argument to oppose to such a well-founded aversion. It is not that I find widows without any attraction when they are young and pretty, and have not left off their mourning. They have little languishing airs, ways of letting their arms droop, bending their necks, and bridling up like a dove bereft of its mate; a number of charming mannerisms are softly veiled beneath crape's transparency, such as the coquetry of despair, sighs adroitly uttered, and tears which fall so opportunely, and leave the eyes so bright! Truly, next to wine, even if not before it, the liquor I love best to drink is a beautiful tear, clear and limpid, trembling upon the tip of blonde or dark lash. What resistance can be opposed to it? None; besides, black suits women so well! The white skin, a poesy apart, turns to ivory, snow, milk, and alabaster. Mourning is good fortune to a woman, and the reason I shall never marry is for fear my wife may have to wear mourning for me. There are women, of course, who do not know how to make the best

of their grief, and weep so that they make their noses red, and distort their features. That is a great danger. A woman requires much charm and art to weep agreeably; without it she runs the risk of being long without consolation. But, however great may be the pleasure of making some Artemisia unfaithful to the shade of her Mausolus, I shall not choose from among the host of the bereft a woman to ask for her heart in exchange for mine.

I can almost hear you say, "Who then will you have? You will neither have young girls, married women, nor widows. You do not like mothers, so I presume you have no great affection for grandmothers. Whom do you really love?" Up till now I have never loved any woman, but I have loved and still love "Love." Although I have not had a mistress, and the women with whom I have had love affairs have only inspired me with desire, I have felt and I can recognize real love. I did not love this woman or that, one rather than the other, but some one I have never seen, though she must exist somewhere, whom I shall find, please God. I know very well what she is like, and when I meet her I shall recognize her.

I have very often pictured to myself the place where she dwells, the costume she wears, her eyes and hair. I can hear her voice; I shall recognize her walk in a thousand, and if by chance her name is spoken I shall turn; it is impossible for her not to have one of the five or six names I have given her in my dreams.

She will be twenty-six, neither more nor less.

She will not be innocent, nor yet blasé. That is a charming age for love-making without puerility or licentiousness. She will be of medium height; I do not care for giants or dwarfs. I wish to be able to bear my beauty from the sofa to the bed; but it would displease me to find her there. Her mouth, when she stands on tiptoe, must be within reach of my kiss. She must have a good figure, rather plump than thin. I have somewhat Turkish ideas on that point, and I should not care to meet a bone where I expected a curve; a woman's skin should be full, and her flesh hard and firm like an unripe peach; that is exactly how the mistress I shall have will be

made. She will be fair with black eyes, fair as a blonde and dark as a brunette, with something red and sparkling in her smile. Her lower lip will be a little full, her throat small and round, her wrists fine, her hands long and plump, her walk undulating like a snake poised upon its tail, her hips strong and mobile, her shoulders broad, and the back of her neck covered with down. She will be a sort of beauty at the same time fine and strong, elegant and vivacious, poetic and real, a Rubens picture.

I would not adorn her with a ring or a bracelet. Her dress must be literally velvet or brocade; I could hardly permit her to descend to satin. I prefer to rumple a silk skirt rather than a cloth one, and to make fall from a head pearls or feathers rather than natural flowers or a simple bow. I know that the lining of the cloth skirt is often as appetizing as that of the silk one; but I prefer the silk skirt. So, in my dreams, I have given myself as mistresses, many queens, empresses, princesses, sultanas, and celebrated courtesans, but never poor women or shepherdesses; and in my most vagabond desires I have never thought of the green sward of the bed of poverty. I consider beauty a diamond to be mounted and encased in gold. I cannot conceive a beautiful woman without carriages, horses, servants, and all the attributes of wealth; there is harmony between beauty and riches. One demands the other; a pretty foot calls for a beautiful shoe, and that, in turn, needs a handsome carpet, a carriage, and their attributes. A beautiful woman with poor clothes in an ugly house is, to my mind, the most painful spectacle it is possible to behold, and I could have no love for her. It is only the rich and beautiful who can be amorous without being ridiculous or pitiable. On this reckoning few people would have the right to be lovers. I myself should first of all be excluded; still, that is my opinion.

We shall meet for the first time in the evening, at the time of a beautiful sunset; the sky will have those orange yellow and pale green tints sometimes seen in pictures by the great masters of the past; there will be a fine avenue of chestnut trees in flower, and ancient elms, the home of the wood-pigeon, beautiful trees of fresh dark green, casting

shadows full of mystery and moisture; that, with a few statues, some marble vases standing out from the green background with the whiteness of snow, a sheet of water where the familiar swan disports itself, and, right in the distance, a mansion of brick and stone, of the Henry IV period, with a roof of pointed slates, lofty chimneys, a weathercock on every gable, and long narrow windows, will complete the scene. At one of these windows will sorrowfully lean on the balcony the queen of my soul in the attire I have just described; behind her will stand a little negro boy holding her fan and parrot. You see there is nothing lacking, and it is all perfectly absurd. The beauty will drop her glove; I shall pick it up, kiss it, and restore it to her. A conversation will ensue; I shall display all the cleverness I do not possess; I shall utter charming phrases and receive suitable replies; the conversation will become a luminous shower of dazzling words. In short, I shall be adorable and adored. As the time for supper approaches I shall be invited to share the meal; I shall accept. What a supper, my old friend, and what a menu my imagination has supplied! Wine will sparkle in the glasses, a white and gold pheasant will smoke upon a crested dish. The meal will be prolonged far into the night, and you may imagine I shall not be the person to bring it to an end. Is not that a fine effort of the imagination? Nothing in the world is more simple, and really it is very surprising that it has not happened ten times rather than once.

Sometimes the scene is laid in a mighty forest. The hunt is passing; the horn is heard, the pack give tongue and cross the ride like a flash of lightning; the beautiful Amazon is mounted upon a Turkish horse, white as milk and frisky. Although she is an excellent horsewoman, her mount rears, prances, and she has the greatest difficulty in the world in controlling him; he takes the bit between his teeth and gallops straight towards a precipice. I drop from the clouds at exactly the right moment; I stop the horse, catch in my arms the fainting princess, I restore her to consciousness, and escort her back to her mansion. What well-born woman would refuse her heart to a man who risked his life for her.

None; and gratitude is a cross road which very quickly leads to love.

You will agree that when I romance I do not do so by halves, and that I am as mad as it is possible to be. That is so, and there is nothing in the world more disagreeable than reasonable madness. You must also admit that when I write letters they are more like volumes than simple notes. In everything I love the unusual. That is why I love you. Don't laugh too loudly at all the nonsense I have written to you; I have cast aside the pen for action, for I have got back to my original text. I desire a mistress. I am not aware whether she will be the lady of the park or the lady of the balcony, but I bid you good-by to go in search of her. My mind is made up. Wherever she may conceal herself I shall find her out. I will let you know the success or non-success of my enterprise. I hope I shall be successful: let me have your good wishes, old friend. I have dressed in my best, and made up my mind to go out and not come back without a mistress to suit my taste. I have dreamed enough; now for action.

P. S.—Let me have news of little D. What has become of him? No one here knows anything of him; give my compliments to your worthy brother and all the family.

CHAPTER II

WELL, old friend, I have returned home after my wanderings, but I must admit that I am still without a mistress. After taking myself by the hand and swearing that I would go to the end of the world, I have only been to the end of the town.

I must tell you the story of my expedition, for it is well worth narrating. I spent two long hours over my toilet, and really did not look at all bad. So, after carefully inspecting myself in the mirror in various lights, to see if I

was good-looking enough and had a sufficient gallant air, I resolutely sallied forth with my head in the air, wearing the real conquering manner.

I was like a second Jason setting forth to the conquest of a golden fleece. But alas! Jason was more fortunate than I; he made the conquest of a beautiful princess as well as the fleece, while I did neither.

I went through the streets gazing at the women and examining them more closely, if they seemed worth the trouble. Some assumed an exceedingly virtuous air and passed by without lifting their eyes. Others seemed astonished at first, and then, if they had beautiful teeth, smiled. Some turned round after a time to look at me, when they thought I was no longer watching them, and blushed as our eyes met. The weather was fine, there was a crowd upon the promenade. But I must admit, in spite of all the respect I bear that half of the human race entitled the "fair sex," that the majority of them are devilishly ugly; hardly one in a hundred is passable. What expressions too, of envy, evil curiosity, greed, and coquetry, were to be seen upon their faces! For a woman who is not beautiful is more ugly than a man who is not handsome!

I saw no one pretty, except a few grisettes; but as they were not of the "silk skirt" class I had no concern with them. In sooth, I think that man, including woman, is the ugliest animal on earth. A lion and tiger are more beautiful than man, and in their species many individual animals attain to all possible beauty.

I am very much afraid, old friend, I shall never be able to attain my ideal, although there is nothing extraordinary or unnatural about it. It is an ideal almost plebeian in its simplicity, and I think that with a bag or two of piastres I should find it quite realizable in the first bazaar I came across in Constantinople or Smyrna; it would probably cost me less than a horse or well-bred dog; but the thought that I shall not succeed, for that is my opinion, is very annoying, and I returned home in a very fine rage against fate.

You, who are not as mad as I, are happy, for you have accepted your life and take things as you find them. You have

not sought happiness, and it has come to find you; you are loved and you love. I do not envy you; at least don't think that; but I find myself less glad in thinking of your happiness than I ought to be, and I tell myself with a sigh that I should like to enjoy similar felicity.

Perhaps my happiness passed me by, and, blind that I am, I did not see it; perhaps the voice spoke, but the noise of my own tempest drowned it.

Perchance I have been loved obscurely by a humble heart which I have misinterpreted or broken; perhaps I have been the ideal of another, the dream of a night and the thought of a day. If I had looked down, perhaps I should have seen a beautiful Madeleine, with moistened hair and a vessel of perfume. I may have passed with my arms lifted up to heaven in an endeavor to capture the gleaming stars which evaded me, and disdained to pluck the little daisy which opened its heart of gold amid the dew and grass. I have committed a great fault. I have asked love for something else than love, and for a thing it cannot give. I have forgotten that love is naked, and I have not realized the sense of this magnificent symbol. I have demanded brocade dresses, feathers, diamonds, a sublime intelligence, knowledge, poesy, beauty, youth, and supreme power, things quite apart; for love can only offer itself, and the persons who desire to draw aught else from it are not worthy of being loved.

Without a doubt I am too hasty; my time is not yet come. God who has loaned me life will not snatch it away before I have lived. What use to a poet is a lyre without strings, to man a life without love? God cannot commit such an inconsistency, and, without a doubt, at the desired moment He will put upon my path the woman I must love and by whom I shall be loved. But why has love come to me before the mistress! Why am I thirsty without having a fountain at which to quench my thirst? or why cannot I fly, like the birds of the desert, to the place where water is to be found? The world to me is a Sahara without wells and date palms. I have not in my life a single shady corner in which to shelter from the sun; I suffer all the ardor of passion without its ecstasy and ineffable delight; I know its torments, but I

do not enjoy its pleasures. I am jealous of that which does not exist; I shed tears which fall to the earth without being wiped away; I give to the wind kisses which are not returned to me; I wait for that which does not come, and I anxiously count the hours as if I had a rendezvous.

Whatever you may be, angel or demon, virgin or courtesan, shepherdess or princess, whether you, the woman I do not know and love, come from the North or the South, do not keep me waiting any longer, or the flame will burn the altar, and you will find in place of my heart nothing but a piece of cold cinder! Come, woman whom I am to love, that I may enclose you in my arms, which have been open so long!

If you come too late, my ideal, I shall no longer have the strength to love you; my soul is like a dovecote full of doves. At every hour of the day some desire flies away from it. The doves return to the dovecote, but desires do not return to the heart. Hasten your footsteps, my dream, or all that will remain in the empty nest will be the feathers of the departed birds.

Old friend, companion of my youth, you are the only one to whom I can tell these things. Write to me that you pity me and do not consider me splenetic; console me, for I have never before had such need of it; how much to be envied are those who have a passion they can satisfy! The drunkard, the sensualist, and the gambler can all assuage their passions or distract themselves, but in my case either is quite impossible.

This idea has so taken possession of me that I have ceased to regard art, and poetry has little charm for me now; my former delights make the least impression upon me now.

I begin to think that I am not in my right senses, and am asking of nature and society more than they can give. The object of my search may not exist, and I must not complain because I cannot find it. But if the woman of whom I dream is not of flesh and blood, why is it that I love her, and not others, since I am a man, and my instinct ought to direct me in an unmistakable way? Who has given me the idea of this imaginary woman? What, then, is this abstract beauty I

feel and cannot define? Why, in the presence of a woman often quite charming, do I sometimes say that she is beautiful, while I think her very ugly? Where then is the model, the type, the internal pattern which serves me as a comparison? For beauty is not an absolute idea, and can only be appreciated by contrast. Have I seen it in the sky, in a star, at a ball, under a mother's wing, in Italy or Spain, here or there, yesterday or long ago? Is she the beloved courtesan, the famous singer, or the princess? Is it Raphael who painted the face which pleases me, or Cleomenes who has polished the marble I adore? Is the mistress a Madonna or a Diana? Is the ideal an angel, a sylph, or a woman?

Alas! the ideal is a little of them all; but how can a real woman, eating and drinking, rising in the morning and going to bed at night, however graceful and adorable she may be, bear comparison with such a creature! It is not reasonable to hope she can do so, but while we hope we seek. What strange blindness it is! It is either sublime or absurd. How I pity and admire those who pursue through it all the reality of their dream, and die content provided that once they have kissed their chimera upon the mouth! But what a frightful fate is that of the lover who has not found his mistress!

Ah, if I were a poet, it is to those whose existence has been a failure, whose arrows have not reached their mark, who have died without uttering the words they had to say and without pressing the hand destined for them, to all who have loved without being loved, who have suffered without being pitied, that I would consecrate my verses; it would be a noble task.

Now all this is very far from our subject, old friend, but the story is such a poor one that I am forced to have recourse to digressions and reflections. I hope that it will not be always thus, and that before long the history of my life will be more entangled and complicated than a Spanish imbroglio.

After wandering from street to street, I made up my mind to call on a friend who would introduce me to a house where, I had been told, all the pretty women were to be seen; a collection of ideals in real life sufficient to satisfy twenty

poets. There are beauties to suit all tastes, for the house is a real seraglio without the eunuchs. My friend tells me that he has already had five or six love affairs there, but I am afraid that I shall not have similar success, though my friend pretends I shall, and even be more favored than I desire. I have, according to him, but one fault in society, which age will correct, and that is thinking too much of the woman and not enough of women. There may be, too, some truth in it. He says I shall be perfectly lovable when I have got rid of this little failing. May it be so! It is necessary for women to feel that I despise them; for a compliment they would consider charming and adorable from the mouth of another angers and displeases them from mine as much as the most biting epigram. That, probably, has some connection with my friend's reproaches.

My heart beat as I ascended the staircase, and I had hardly mastered my emotion when my friend, nudging me with his elbow, brought me face to face with a woman of about thirty, who was passably good-looking and dressed luxuriously, though with an extremely pretentious and childish simplicity, which did not prevent her from being plastered with red like a carriage-wheel. She was the lady of the house.

C., assuming the mocking and shrill voice, so different from his usual tones, which he uses in society when he wishes to pose as a charmer, began with a great show of ironical respect, through which the most profound contempt could be discerned, half aloud, half in a whisper: "This is the young man I mentioned to you the other day, a fellow of great attainments; he is well bred, and I feel sure you will be glad to welcome him; that is the reason I have taken the liberty of bringing him."

"Certainly, sir, you have done quite right," the lady replied, simpering in a most extravagant fashion. Then she turned to me, and after looking me up and down, out of the corner of her eye, in a way that made me blush up to my ears, said, "You can consider yourself as invited once and for all, sir, and come as often as you have an evening to spare."

I bowed, awkwardly enough, and murmured a few incoherent words, not likely to give her a great idea of my abil-

ities; then, other people arriving, I was delivered from the boredom inseparable from presentation. C. drew me into a corner by the window and began to instruct me.

"Well, you are a fine fellow! You will compromise me. I described you as a mental phenomenon, a man with a frenzied imagination, a lyrical poet of the most transcendent and passionate order, and you stand there like a blockhead without uttering a word! What a poor effort! I thought you were a little more prolific. Come, let loose the bridle of your tongue; babble something. There is no need to make sensible and judicious remarks—on the other hand, they would be detrimental to you; but it is quite essential to talk; say a great deal and make it last; attract attention to yourself; cast aside all fear and modesty; get well into your head the fact that all present are fools, or almost, and do not forget that an orator who wants to succeed cannot despise his audience too much. What do you think of the mistress of the house?"

"She displeases me considerably, already; and although I spoke to her for barely a minute, I was almost as bored as if I had been her husband."

"Ah! is that your opinion of her?"

"Yes."

"So your dislike to her is quite insurmountable? So much the worse; it would have been the correct thing for you to have been her lover for at least a month, and a young man cannot be better launched into society than by her."

"Ah well! I will make the best of it," I replied in pitiful tones, "since it is necessary; but must I also pretend to be in earnest?"

"Alas, yes; that is quite indispensable, and I will explain the reason. Madame de Thémynes is now in the fashion; she has all the mannerisms of the day to a superior degree and sometimes those of to-morrow, but never those of yesterday; she is quite up-to-date. People wear what she wears, but she never wears what has been worn. Besides, she is rich, and her carriages are in the best of taste. She has no mind, but a great deal of chatter; she has very vigorous tastes and little passion. She can be pleased, but not touched, for her heart is cold, though she has a licentious head. As for her

soul, if she has one, which is doubtful, it is very black, and there is no spite and unkindness of which she is not capable; but she is extremely clever, and preserves appearances so far as it is necessary, so that nothing can be proved against her. For that reason she will have a love affair with a man though she will not write him the simplest of notes. On this account, her enemies most familiar with her ways can find nothing to say against her except that she puts on her rouge too thickly, and that certain parts of her person are not actually as round as they appear to be—that is false.”

“How do you know?”

“What a question! How do we find out such things, except by personal observation?”

“So you have been her lover?”

“Certainly! Why not? It would have been most unseemly of me not to have done so. She has done me great services, and I am very grateful to her.”

“I do not understand the kind of services she can have rendered you?”

“Are you really a fool?” C. then said, looking at me with a most comical expression. “I am beginning to think so; must I then tell you everything? Madame de Thémynes professes, and quite rightly so, to have special information from certain places, and a young man whom she has taken under her wing for a time can boldly present himself anywhere, and be quite sure that he will not be long without a love affair, and often have two rather than one. Beyond this outstanding advantage, another almost as great is that when society women see that you are the acknowledged lover of Madame de Thémynes, even if they have not the slightest liking for you, they look upon it as a pleasure and a duty to take you away from a fashionable woman like her, and instead of having to make advances and overtures, you will have quite an embarrassing choice, and become the target of every possible encouragement and attention. But if she inspires you with such repugnance, do not attempt the conquest. You are not precisely obliged to do so, though it would have been polite and expedient to have done so. But quickly make a choice and lay siege to the heart of the

woman who pleases you most, or seems to offer the greatest facilities, for, if you do not, you will lose the benefit of novelty and the advantage that gives you for a few days over all the other suitors here. All these ladies have no conception of passions born in intimacy, and developed slowly in respect and silence. They are fonder of lightning wooings and occult sympathies, and these are marvelously well designed to do away with the boredom of resistance, and all those repetitions and delays which sentiment introduces into the romance of love, and which only serve to unnecessarily postpone its consummation. These ladies are very economical with their time, and it appears to them so precious that they would be in the depths of despair were a single moment of it to be left unemployed. They have a longing to oblige mankind which cannot be too highly praised, and they love their neighbor as themselves—another perfectly gospel-like and meritorious trait; they are very charitable creatures, who would not on any account cause the death of a man through despair.

“Three or four of them already seem to be favorably impressed by you, and I should, in a friendly way, advise you to press home the attack, instead of amusing yourself by standing chattering to me at a window, for that will not advance your position much.”

“But, my dear C., I am quite new to all this, and have not the ability to distinguish at a glance whether a woman is favorably impressed with me or not; and I might commit some curious blunders, if you did not assist me with your experience.”

“Really, you are unutterably primitive, and I would not have thought it possible for a man to be so pastoral and bucolic in the century in which we are privileged to live! What use do you make of your pair of big black eyes, which would have a most killing effect if you only knew how to use them properly. Look at the little woman in red in the corner near the fire place, playing with her fan. She has been ogling you for the last quarter of an hour with significant intensity. She has such a superior way of being indecent, and displays such noble effrontery. She displeases the other

women very much, for they despair of reaching the lofty pinnacle of impudence that she has attained; but, on the other hand, she is a great favorite with the men, who find that she possesses all the piquancy of a courtesan. Her depravity is really very charming, for she is clever, spirited, and capricious. She is an excellent mistress for a young man with prejudices. In a week she will rid your conscience of every scruple and corrupt your heart so that you will never again be ridiculous or elegiac. She has on all subjects inexpressibly positive ideas; she goes to the root of things with quite astonishing rapidity and certainty. This little woman is algebra incarnate; she is just the thing for a dreamer and an enthusiast. She will soon correct your lazy idealism, and, in so doing, will render you a great service. She will do it, too, with the greatest of pleasure, for the disenchantment of poets is an instinct with her."

My curiosity being aroused by C.'s description, I left my retreat, and making my way between the various groups, approached the lady and took careful stock of her. She was about twenty-five or twenty-six. She was short, but well proportioned, although somewhat inclined to plumpness; she had a white, fat arm, and a fine hand, with a pretty, though not too tiny, foot; her shoulders were plump and gleaming, and her throat was small, but very satisfying, and giving a good idea of the rest of her person. Her hair was of an extremely brilliant blue-black, like the wings of a jay; her nose was small, with the nostrils wide open, her mouth moist and sensual, and she had a little line upon her lower lip. With it all was a life, animation, health, strength, and something of an expression of luxury, cleverly tempered by coquetry and intrigue, which made her a most desirable creature, and justified, or more than justified, the passions she had inspired and did arouse every day.

I liked her, but I nevertheless realized that this woman, agreeable though she was, would not realize my desire and make me say. "At last I have a mistress!"

I went back to C. and said, "The lady pleases me, and perhaps I may come to an understanding with her. But before committing myself, I should be greatly obliged if you would

point out to me the other indulgent beauties who did me the honor to be favorably impressed with me, so that I may make my choice. It will be doing me a great favor if, as you are my instructor here, you will add a short notice of each, mention their faults and good qualities, instruct me in the way I should attack them and the tone I should adopt with them, so that I may not appear too much like a provincial or a literary man."

"I am quite agreeable," C. replied. "Do you see that beautiful, sorrowful swan, bending her neck so harmoniously and moving her sleeves like wings; she is modesty personified, and everything chaste and virginal in the world; she has a forehead of snow, a heart of ice, the glances of a Madonna, the smile of an Agnes, a white robe, and a soul of the same color; she wears in her hair nothing but orange blossoms or water-lily leaves, and is only kept down to earth by a thread. She has never had a bad thought, and is profoundly ignorant of the way in which a man differs from a woman. The Holy Virgin is a Bacchante compared with her, but that does not prevent her from having more lovers than any woman I know, and really that is not saying a little. Examine the discreet lady's throat; it is a little masterpiece, and really it is difficult to show as much while hiding more; tell me if, with all her restrictions and prudery, she is not ten times more indecent than the good lady on her left, who bravely displays two hemispheres which, if they were joined together, would form a globe of the natural size, or the other on her right, with her dress cut so low that she is displaying her person with charming intrepidity. This virginal creature, unless I am very much mistaken, has already calculated in her head the promises of love and passion in your pallor and black eyes; and the reason I have for saying so is that she has not once looked in your direction—at least, not to all appearances, for she can use her eyes so skilfully, and look out of the corners so cleverly, that nothing escapes her; you would think she could see out of the back of her head, for she knows quite well what is going on behind her. She is a female Janus. If you want to succeed with her, you must eschew a familiar, overbearing manner. You must

speak to her without looking at her, without a movement, in a contrite attitude, and in respectful and subdued tones; in this way you can tell her what you please, provided that it is well glossed over, and then she will allow you the greatest liberty in words and afterwards in actions. Take care to roll your eyes tenderly when she has her breasts lowered, and speak to her of the delights of platonic love and the commerce of souls, whilst employing the most unplatonic and least ideal pantomime possible! She is very sensual and very susceptible; kiss her as much as you please; but in the most intimate of relations do not forget to call her Madam at least three times in every sentence; she quarreled with me because of my familiarity, though I was her lover. Well, a woman is not honorable for nothing."

"I have not a great inclination, after what you have told me, to chance the adventure. A prudish Messaline! the combination is novel and monstrous."

"Old as the world, my dear fellow! Instances are to be found every day, and nothing is more common. You are wrong not to attach yourself to her. Her great attraction is that with her one always appears to be committing a mortal sin, and the tiniest kiss appears quite damnable; while with others it hardly seems like a venial offense, and often even none at all. That is the reason I retained her longer than any other mistress. I should still have her, if she had not left of her own accord; she is the only woman who has forestalled me, and I have a certain respect for her on that account. She possesses certain of the most delicate refinements of pleasure, and the great art of appearing to allow the favors she grants so freely to be wrested from her, and this gives to each one the charm of a rape. You will find in society ten of her lovers who will swear to you that she is the most virtuous creature in the world. She is precisely the opposite. To dissect this virtue upon a pillow is a curious study. As you are forewarned you run no risk, and you will not be foolish enough to become really enamored of her."

"How old is this adorable person?" I asked C., for it was impossible to determine her age even after a most careful scrutiny.

"Ah! that is a mystery. I, who pride myself on being able to tell a woman's age almost to a minute, have never been able to discover hers. Approximately, I should think she is between twenty-eight and thirty-six. I have seen her dressed and undressed, and I have learned nothing; my experience is quite at fault; she seems most like eighteen, but that cannot be her age. She has the body of a virgin with the soul of a courtesan, and to become so thoroughly corrupt requires time or genius; it needs a heart of bronze in a breast of steel; she has neither the one nor the other. For that reason I think she is thirty-six, but, after all, I am quite in the dark."

"Has she no intimate friend who could enlighten you?"

"No, she appeared here two years ago. She came from the provinces or abroad, I don't know which, and that is an admirable position for a woman who knows how to profit by it. With a face like hers she can give herself any age she pleases, and only date from the day she came here."

He pointed out several others who, according to him, would favorably receive any request it might please me to address to them, and would treat me with quite exceptional philanthropy. But the woman in red in the corner of the fireplace and the modest dove who served as her antithesis were incomparably better than all the others, and if they had not all the qualities I demanded, they had some of them at least in appearance.

I talked all the evening to them, especially the latter, and I took care to cast my ideas in a most respectful mold; although she hardly looked at me, I thought I sometimes saw her eyes glisten beneath the curtain of her brows, and a slight rosy tint appear beneath her skin at some rather pronounced gallantries, well veiled though they were, upon which I ventured. Her replies generally were serious and guarded, but still keen and full of point, and provided food for thought rather than actual expressions. Her talk was interspersed with reticences, half-words, and indirect allusions, of which each syllable had its intention, each silence its meaning; nothing in the world could be more diplomatic or charming. Yet, however great the momentary pleasure of such a con-

versation, I could not endure it long. It was necessary to be continually on the watch and on guard, whereas in a conversation, familiarity and confidence are the qualities I prefer. We talked of music, then the conversation naturally drifted to the opera, and afterwards to women and love, the easiest subject of all in which to pass from generality to specialty. I would not have believed myself capable of such a display of pathos and nonsense. It was the evening of my life, when I assumed my most virtuous air, while all the time my mind was filled with the most opposite intentions. My expression of face would have lulled the suspicions of a mother most solicitous of her daughter's honor, and any husband would have intrusted his wife to my care. I thought it was more difficult than that to be a hypocrite and to say things one did not mean. But it must be easy enough, or very much according to my inclination, or else I should not have been so successful at my first attempt.

As for the lady, she entered into many details which, in spite of her candid manner, proved her extensive experience; it is not possible to give any idea of the subtlety of her distinctions. From her way of speaking, too, it was impossible to believe that she had even the shadow of a body, there being something of the immaterial, vaporous, and ideal about her; and if C. had not warned me of her behavior, I should most certainly have despaired of the success of my attentions and held myself pitifully aloof. How, too, can one, after a woman has talked in the most unconcerned fashion possible for two hours about love existing only on privation and sacrifice, and other beautiful things of this nature, decently hope to persuade her one day to take pity on oneself.

Briefly we were great friends when we parted, congratulating each other, as we did so, on the purity and loftiness of our sentiments.

My conversation with the other lady, as you may imagine, was of quite a different character. We laughed as often as we spoke. We made fun of all the woman present, in a very clever fashion; when I say we made fun of all the women, I mean that she did so, for a man never ridicules a woman. I listened and applauded, for hers was the most curious gal-

lery of caricatures I have ever seen. In spite of their exaggeration, the truth underlying her pictures was apparent. C. was quite right; this woman's mission was to disenchant poets. She had about her an atmosphere of prose in which a poetic idea could not live. She was charming and sparkingly clever, and yet, at her side, ignoble and vulgar thoughts were the only ones which came into one's head; as I talked to her, I felt a number of incongruous and at the time impracticable desires enter my mind. I felt a longing for wine with which to become intoxicated, I wished to drop down on one knee and kiss her throat, to raise the hem of her dress to see if her garter was above or below the knee, to sing a vulgar song at the top of my voice, to smoke a pipe or break the windows. All the animal part, the brute, rose to the surface in me; I would most willingly have spat upon Homer's *Iliad*, and I would have knelt down before a ham. I now understand perfectly the allegory of the companions of Ulysses who were turned into swine by Circe. Circe was probably lively, like the little woman in red.

I am ashamed to confess that I experienced a great delight in feeling myself overwhelmed by brutishness. I offered no opposition, but aided with all my strength, so natural is corruption to man, and so much mud is there in the clay from which he is moulded.

But I had a slight fear of this gangrene which was gaining possession of me, and I wished to leave the corruptress; but I seemed to be chained to my seat.

In the end I tore myself away from her, and it being very late, I returned home in great perplexity, very disturbed in my mind, and hardly knowing what to do. I hesitated between prudery and gallantry. I found pleasure in the one and piquancy in the other; and after a long and profound examination of conscience, I realized not that I loved them both, but that I liked them, one as much as the other.

From all appearances, old friend, I shall make love to one of these women, perhaps both, and yet that will only half satisfy me; it is not because they are not pretty, but at the sight of them nothing cried out in me, palpitated, or said, "These are the women." I did not recognize them. Still, I

don't think I shall meet any one better on the score of breeding and beauty, so I will follow C.'s advice, and one or the other shall be my mistress; but in the depths of my heart a secret voice reproaches me with being false to my love, and halting like this at the first smile of a woman I do not love, instead of tirelessly searching through the world, in cloisters and in slums, in palaces and in taverns, for the woman who was made for me, whom God destined for me, whether she be princess or servant, nun or courtesan.

Then I told myself that I was full of fancies, and after all, what did it matter whether it was one woman or another, that the earth would still pursue its path and the seasons succeed one another. But it was in vain that I reasoned like that, for I was neither easier in my mind nor more resolute.

That is perhaps the result of my living very much by myself, for the tiniest details in such a monotonous life as mine assume great importance. I listen too much to myself living and thinking. I hear the throbbing of my arteries, the pulsations of my heart. I disentangle my most elusive ideas from the vapor in which they float and I give them a body. If I acted more I should not see all these little things, and I should not have the time to examine my own soul under the microscope, as I do all day. The sound of action would dissipate the host of idle thoughts which flutter through my head and stupefy me with the buzzing of their wings. Instead of pursuing phantoms I should struggle with realities; I should ask women for what they could give, pleasure, and I should not try to embrace some fantastic ideal adorned with shadowy perfections. This fierce tension of the eye of my soul towards an invisible object falsifies my sight. I am deprived of the ability to see what exists through looking at what does not, and my eye, so piercing where the ideal is concerned, is quite short-sighted when confronted with the real; thus I have known women whom all the world called delightful, yet I did not think them so. I have greatly admired pictures which were considered by most people bad, and strange and unintelligible verses have given me more pleasure than the finest efforts. I should not be surprised, after addressing so many sighs to the moon, gazing so long at the stars, com-

posing so many sentimental elegies and apostrophes, if I were to fall in love with an ignoble courtesan or an old and ugly woman; it would be a fitting conclusion. Or perhaps, being unable to find anything in the world worthy of my love, I shall end by adoring myself. To protect myself from so great a misfortune I gaze into all the mirrors and streams I see. Really, through my reveries and aberrations, I have an enormous fear of falling into the monstrous and unnatural. That is serious, and must be carefully avoided. Good-by, old friend. I am going to see the lady in red, so that I may avoid my usual contemplation. I do not think spiritualism will occupy much of our time, although she is a very "spiritual" creature. I am carefully putting on one side my ideal, so as not to contrast her with it. I wish to quietly enjoy the beauty and merits she has. It is a wise resolution, but I do not know whether I shall keep to it. Once more, good-by.

CHAPTER III

I AM the lover of the lady in red; it is almost a state, an obligation, and it gives a stability to the world. I have no longer the appearance of a schoolboy seeking an adventure among the grandmothers, and not daring to recite a madrigal to a woman unless she be a hundred. I can see since my installation that I am esteemed a great deal more highly, that all the women speak to me in a jealously coquettish fashion and make great advances to me. The men, on the other hand, put more coldness into the few words we exchange, and there is something hostile and constrained in their manner. They feel that they already have in me a dangerous rival, and one who may become even more so. I recall how severely they criticized my attire and the way I arrange my hair, but all the ladies look upon me as a model of good taste and

appreciate the compliment I pay them by the elegance of my attire.

The lady of the house at first seemed a little piqued at my choice, which she considered ought to have fallen upon herself, and for a few days she maintained some amount of asperity to her rival, though to myself she has always been the same. She, however, confined herself to the thousand and one little unfriendly observations which women make to one another when the opportunity presents itself, consisting generally of a criticism of their dress, their coiffure or their appearance. But soon another object attracted the attention of the slighted woman, the little war of words ceased, and everything pursued its normal course.

Though I have told you that I am the lover of the lady in red, I suppose that will not satisfy you; you will want to know her name. I shall not, however, tell you her real name, but will call her Rosette, which is a pretty enough name.

Your love of precision in affairs of the sort will lead you to desire to know the story of my love affair with this lady step by step, and the way in which I passed from the general to the particular, and from the rôle of spectator to that of actor. I will satisfy your wishes with the greatest of pleasure. There is nothing sinister in our romance, everything is *couleur de rose*, and the only tears shed are those of pleasure; there are no delays or rebuffs, and everything progresses with the haste and rapidity so commended by Horace—just like a French novel. Still, do not think I carried the citadel at the first assault. The princess, though very human to her subjects, is not as prodigal of her favors as at first seemed probable; she knows too well their value not to exact their full value; she also knows the advantages of a proper delay and a partial resistance, so she will not surrender herself to a man at first, however strong a liking she may have for him.

But to tell the story from the time of our first meeting. I met her once, twice, or even three times at the same place, then she asked me to call upon her; I did not wait to be entreated, you may imagine; I went discreetly at first, then a little more often, then oftener still, and then every time I felt so disposed, which, I must admit, was often three or four

times a day. The lady, after I had been absent a few hours, received me as if I had just returned from the East Indies; I was not insensible to this, and felt obliged to show my gratitude in a manner marked by the utmost gallantry, and she responded to the best of her ability.

Rosette, as we have agreed to call her, is a very clever woman, understanding the male sex in the most admirable fashion; although she delayed for some time the end of the chapter, I never once became angry with her—really a very wonderful thing, for you know how angry I become when my desires are thwarted, and when a woman exceeds the time I have allotted her in my mind. I do not know how she did it; but from our first meeting she made me understand that she would be mine, and I was more certain of her than if I held her promise signed and sealed in my hand. It might, perhaps, be urged that the familiarity of her manners left a free field for the temerity of hope. I do not think that was the real reason. I have seen some women whose extraordinary freedom, though it excluded every shadow of a doubt, did not produce this effect upon me, and I have been nervous and anxious in their presence.

Generally, I am less amiable to women I like than to those who are indifferent to me, and the cause of it is my passionate watchfulness and my uncertainty as to success; these things make me gloomy, and cast me into a reverie which deprives me of my abilities and presence of mind. When I see the hours I had destined for another occupation pass one by one, anger overcomes me in spite of myself, and I cannot help making biting and satirical remarks, which sometimes are quit brutal, and hinder terribly my project. With Rosette I never had that feeling; even when she resisted the most strongly, I never gained the impression she desired to escape my love. I allowed her to quietly display her coquetries, I accepted patiently the delays it pleased her to impose upon my passion. There was something smiling in her firmness which consoled me as far as possible, and in her cruelty there was visible a human undercurrent which removed all cause for serious alarm. Honorable women, even when they are so to the least possible extent, have a reluctant and dis-

dainful manner which is quite unbearable to me. They seem to be always on the point of ringing and having one turned out by their servants; and it seems to me that a man who takes the trouble to make love to a woman (and that is not so agreeable as people would have you believe) does not deserve to be looked at in that way.

Dear Rosette has no glances of that sort; I can assure you she profits by the fact. I have made the best of my cleverness, and by the fire and smartness of her answers she has caused me to excel myself. It is true that I have not been poetic, but that is hardly possible with her. Still she has her poetic side, in spite of all that C. has told me; but she is so full of life, force, and movement, she has the appearance of being so happy in her surroundings, that one has no wish to see her leave them to ascend into the clouds. She occupies real life so agreeably, and makes it so amusing for herself and for others, that reverie has nothing better to offer.

Rosette has the best disposition in the world, as far as men are concerned be it understood, for with women she is an incarnation of evil; she is gay, lively, alert, ready for anything, quite original in her way of speaking, and she always has some charming and unexpected witticism to tell. She is a delightful companion rather than mistress; and if I were a few years older, and had a few less romantic ideas, that would be quite sufficient for me, and I should consider myself the most fortunate individual in the world. But—oh, that word of ill omen!—I am an imbecile, idiot, a real goose; never satisfied, always looking for midday at two o'clock; and instead of being perfectly happy I am only half. Of course, that is a great deal for this world, but still I find it not enough.

In the eyes of the world I have a mistress whom several desire and envy me, and whom no one would disdain. In appearance, then, my object is fulfilled, and I have no longer any right to quarrel with fate. Yet I do not seem to have a mistress, and if any one were to unexpectedly ask me if I had one, I believe I should say "no." The possession, however, of a woman who has beauty, youth, and intelligence constitutes what in every country and age is called a mis-

tress, and I do not think there is any other way. That does not prevent me from having the strangest doubts on this score, and they go so far that, if several persons agreed to maintain that I am not Rosette's favored lover, in spite of the palpable evidence to the contrary, in the end I should believe them.

Do not think, after what I have told you, that I do not love her, or that she displeases me in any way. On the contrary, I love her very dearly, and find her, like everybody else, a pretty, piquant creature. I simply do not feel that she belongs to me, that is all. One of her kisses, the most chaste of her caresses, makes me quiver to the soles of my feet, and makes my blood rush to my heart. Although I admit that, the fact still stands as I have told you. But man's heart is full of such absurdities; and if it were necessary to reconcile all the contradiction it contains, that would be a heavy task. What is their origin? Truly I do not know.

I see her all day, and at all times if I wish. Her complaisance is inexhaustible; she enters perfectly into all my caprices, however strange they may be.

I am very unfortunate not to be able to acquire the moral certainty of a thing of which I have the physical proof. The opposite is usually the case, and it is the fact which proves the idea; I should like to prove the fact by the idea. I cannot do so; strange though it seems, it is nevertheless true. Up to a certain point the possession of a mistress depends upon myself; but I cannot make myself believe that I have one in her. If I have not the necessary faith for so obvious a thing, it is as impossible for to believe in a simple fact as it is for others to believe in the Trinity. Faith is not acquired, it is a pure gift, a special grace from Heaven.

Never has any one desired as much as I have to live some one else's life and to assimilate another nature; no one has ever succeeded so badly. Whatever I do, other men are to me but phantoms, and I do not realize their existence; it is not, however, the desire to find out their life and participate in it that I lack. It is the power of real sympathy. The existence or non-existence of a thing or person does not sufficiently interest me to affect me in a sensible and con-

vincing manner. The sight of a woman or a man appearing to me in real life does not leave upon my mind stronger traces than a dream's fantastic vision; around me moves a pale world of shadows, of false or true apparitions, flitting hither and thither, in the midst of which I find myself as perfectly alone as possible, for they have no influence upon me for good or evil, and they seem of quite a different nature to myself. If I speak to them, and they give an almost common-sense reply, I am as surprised as if my dog or cat suddenly found its tongue and joined in the conversation; the sound of their voices always astonishes me, and I would gladly believe that they are only fugitive appearances, of which I am the object mirror. Whether inferior or superior, I am most certainly not of their species. There are times when I only recognize God above me, and others when I consider myself hardly the equal of the wood-louse or the mollusc upon its sand-bank; but in whatever state of mind I am, high or low, I have never been able to persuade myself that men are really like myself. When I am called "sir," or spoken of as "this gentleman," I think it very strange. Even my name seems an imaginary title, and not my real name; but however low it is spoken, in the midst of the loudest uproar, I turn quickly, with a convulsive and febrile rapidity for which I have never been able to account. Is it the fear of finding an antagonist or enemy in the man who knows my name, and to whom I am no longer one of the crowd?

In particular, when I have lived with a woman, I have most clearly realized what an invincible repulsion my nature has to any alliance of mixture. I am like a drop of oil in a glass of water. However much you shake the glass, the oil will never mix with the water; but the former will split up into a hundred thousand little globules, which will rejoin and rise to the surface as soon as the shaking ceases; the drop of oil and the glass of water sum up my history. Even pleasure, the diamond chain which unites all beings, the devouring fire which melts the rocks and metals of the soul, and makes them dissolve into tears, just as real fire in its omnipotence dissolves iron and granite, has never been able to subdue or soften me. Yet I have the keenest of sensibili-

ties ; but my soul is at enmity with my body, and the unhappy couple, like any possible pair, legal or illegal, live in a state of perpetual warfare. The arms of a woman, which, it is said, bind all that is best on earth, are to me the weakest of bonds, and I was never further from my mistress than when she pressed me to her heart. I was stifled, that was all. How many times have I been enraged with myself ! How many efforts have I made to be different ! How have I exhorted myself to be tender, amorous, passionate, without success ! How often have I tried to involve my soul in my love affairs ! But what a punishment it must be for my poor soul to assist at the debauchery of my body, and to perpetually sit down at feasts where it has nothing to eat !

With Rosette, I have made up my mind once for all to determine whether I am not decidedly unsociable, and prove whether I can take sufficient interest in another's existence to believe in it. I have exhausted myself with my tests, without setting my doubts at rest. With her my pleasure is so keen that the soul is, often enough, if not touched at least distracted, and that deprives observations of a great deal of their exactness. After all I recognized that it was only skin deep, and that I only had surface enjoyment in which out of curiosity alone did the soul participate. I enjoyed a certain amount of pleasure because I am young and passionate ; but the pleasure came from myself, and not from another. Its cause is in myself rather than in Rosette.

I have tried in vain, for I have not succeeded in emerging from myself for a moment.

I am the same as before, a very bored and wearisome person, who displeases me very much. I have not succeeded in introducing into my brain some other person's ideas, into my soul another person's sentiments, or into my body the sorrow or enjoyment of another. I am a prisoner in myself, and invasion is quite impossible. The prisoner desires to escape, the walls ask nothing better than to crumble, the gates to open to let him go ; I know not what fatality retains every stone in its place and every bolt in its socket ; it is quite as impossible to admit some one else into myself as to transfer myself to another ; I know not how to pay or receive visits,

and I live in the most melancholy isolation in the midst of the crowd. My bed cannot belong to a widower, but my heart does always.

Ah! to be unable to increase myself by a single particle, by a single atom; to be unable to make the blood of another flow in my veins; to see always with my own eyes, neither more clearly nor more distantly than before; to listen to sounds with the same ears and emotion; to touch with the same fingers, to be condemned to the same tones of the voice, the same phrases and words, and to be unable to flee from myself and take refuge in some unapproachable corner; to be forced to remain with myself forever, to dine and sleep, to be the same man for twenty different women; to drag into the strangest situations of the drama of life a person whose part you know by heart; to think the same things, to have the same dreams: what punishment, what boredom it all is.

I have desired the heart of the brothers Tangut, the hat of Fortunatus, the wand of Abaris, the ring of Gyges. I would have sold my soul to snatch the magic ring from some fairy's hand; but I have never desired anything so much as, like Tiresias the soothsayer, to meet in the mountains those serpents which bring about the change of sex, and the attributes I envy most in the monstrous and curious gods of India are their countless transformations.

I began by desiring to be another man; then reflecting that I could, by analogy, almost foresee what I should feel, and so not experience the surprise and expected change, I should have preferred to be a woman. That idea has always come to me when I had a mistress who was not ugly; for an ugly woman is a man to me, and in moments of pleasure I would willingly exchange my part, for it is very annoying not to have a consciousness of the effect one produces, and only be able to judge of the enjoyment of others by one's own. These thoughts and many others have often given me, at times when it was very much out of place, a dreamy and meditative air which has caused me, quite wrongly, to be accused of coolness and infidelity,

Rosette, who does not know all this, fortunately considers

me the most amorous man on earth; she takes my impotent fury for passion, and lends herself to all the experimental caprices which come into my head.

I have done everything possible to convince myself of her reality. I have tried to descend into her heart, but I have always halted at the first step, at her skin or her mouth. In spite of our relations, I know very well there is nothing common to both of us. Never has an idea similar to mine unfurled its wings in her pretty, good-tempered head; never has her heart, full of life and fire, the motive power of a breast so pure and firm, beaten in unison with my own. My soul has never united with her soul. Cupid, the god with wings, did not kiss Psyche upon her beautiful ivory brow. No! this woman is not my mistress.

If you only knew all I have done to force my soul to share my body's love! With what fury have I fastened my mouth to her mouth, buried my arms in her hair, and clasped her round and supple waist. I have drunk her breath and the warm tears trickling from the overflowing cup of her eyes. The more we embraced the less I loved her. My soul sadly looked on at this deplorable hymen to which it was not invited with an air of pity, or else retired in disgust to weep silently apart. It seems that I really do not love Rosette, worthy though she be of my affection, and great though my desire to bestow it.

To rid myself of the idea that I am myself, I have conjured up strange surroundings in which it was quite improbable I should recognize myself, and I have tried, being unable to cast aside my individuality, to make it quite unrecognizable. I have met with very little success in this, and the devil of myself obstinately pursues me; there is no way of defeating him; I am not in a position to make the excuse as to other unwelcome visitors—that I am not at home, or have gone into the country.

I have taken my mistress to bathe, and I have played the part of Triton to the best of my ability, the sea being a large marble basin, where the water, transparent though it was, seemed to conceal a part of the Nereid's exquisite beauty. At night, by moonlight we have sailed together in a gondola to

the accompaniment of music; common though this is in Venice, it is a novelty here.

We have galloped through the darkness together in her carriage. I have climbed through her window, though I have had the key of the door in my pocket. I have made her call upon me in broad daylight, and compromised her so thoroughly that no one now, with the exception of myself, doubts that she is my mistress.

In spite of all these extravagances, which, were I not so young, would seem like the resources of a worn-out libertine, Rosette adores me more than any one. She sees in them the ardor of a petulant and uncontrollable love, which is always the same in spite of a difference of time and place. She sees in them the never-ceasing effect of her charm and the triumph of her beauty, and really I would she were right, for in all justice it is neither her fault nor mine that she is not.

The only thing I have against her is that I am myself. If I were to tell her so, she would quickly answer that in her eyes this was my greatest merit, a reply which would be more polite than sensible.

Once, at the commencement of our liaison, I thought I had attained my object, for a moment I believed that I loved her. Old friend, that moment was the only one I have lived, and if that minute had been an hour, I should have become a god. We were riding together, I upon Ferragus, she upon a snow-white mare that looked like a unicorn, so slender were her legs and slim her neck. We were traversing a great avenue of elms of tremendous height; the sun descended upon us warm and bright, though tempered by the foliage; in a mackerel sky long lines of pale blue stretched across the edges of the horizon, and changed into an extremely soft apple-green when they met the orange tints of the sunset. The appearance of the sky was charming and singular; the breeze bore a most delightful odor of wild flowers. From time to time a bird rose in front of us and burst into song as it crossed the avenue. The bell of a village we could not see softly rang out the Angelus, and its silver tones, softened by distance, was infinitely sweet. Our mounts walked side by side at exactly the same pace.

My heart dilated and my soul overflowed into my body. I had never been so happy. Neither I nor Rosette spoke, and yet never before had we so well understood one another. We were so close together that my leg touched Rosette's mare. I leaned towards her and put my arm around her waist; she made a similar movement and leaned her head upon my shoulder. Our mouths joined in a chaste and most delightful kiss! Our horses walked on with their bridles on their necks. I felt Rosette's arm relax, and her body bend more and more. I myself became weak and was ready to faint. I can assure you, at that moment I hardly considered whether I was myself or some one else. We had reached the end of the avenue like this, when the sound of footsteps made us quickly resume our proper positions; it was a mounted patrol who saluted us. If I had been provided with pistols I believe I should have fired.

I assumed a furious and threatening air which must have seemed very strange. After all, I was wrong to become so angry, for I had been rendered a great service by the unwitting interruption of my pleasure at a point when by its own intensity it was becoming painful and would collapse under its own violence. To stop in time is a science which is not always regarded with all the respect it deserves. Sometimes when you put your arm around a woman's waist, at first you experience a great pleasure at the touch of her warm flesh. If the beauty goes to sleep in this amorous and charming position her muscles relax, and then your arm is more heavily weighted; you begin to realize that she is a woman, not a sylph. You would not remove your arm for anything on earth for many reasons, one of them being that it is dangerous to wake a woman from her sleep; another that by asking her to raise herself so that you may withdraw your arm you tell her in an indirect fashion that she is heavy and tires you, or else you make her think you are weak or weary, and that has a most humiliating and harmful effect in her mind as far as you are concerned. The third reason is that once having had pleasure in that position, there is a mistaken idea that in retaining the position the pleasure will recur. The poor arm is helpless under the weight which

weighs it down, the blood stops flowing, the nerves are disturbed, and the numbing gives you the feeling of being pricked with thousands of needles. Day comes at last and delivers you from your martyrdom, and you leap from the rack with more haste than ever husband made in descending from the nuptial scaffold.

This is the history of many passions and all pleasures. In spite of the interruption, or on its account, I never before experienced such pleasure. I felt that I was really another person. Rosette's soul had entirely entered into my body. My soul had left me and had occupied her heart as her soul had done mine. Without a doubt they met on the way in the long kiss we exchanged (our "equestrian" kiss, as Rosette has since dubbed it), and had been interchanged and intermingled as closely as the souls of two mortal creatures could upon a grain of perishable clay.

Assuredly angels must embrace like that, and true paradise is not in heaven, but upon the mouth of the beloved.

I have waited in vain for a similar moment, and I have unsuccessfully tried to provoke its return. We have often ridden through the avenues of the forest at sunset; the trees had the same verdure, the birds sang similar songs, but we found the sun dimmed and the foliage dull, while the notes of the birds seemed harsh and discordant, for harmony was no longer in us. We slackened our horses to a walk and attempted a similar kiss. Alas! our lips alone joined, and it was but the specter of the former kiss. The beautiful, sublime, divine kiss, the only real kiss I have given and received in my life, had departed for ever. From that day I have always returned from the wood with a fund of inexpressible sadness. Rosette, gay and frolicsome though she usually is, cannot escape from this impression, and her reverie is betrayed by a little, delicately puckered pout, which is at least as charming as her smile.

Only the fumes of wine and brilliant lights can rid me of these melancholy thoughts. We drink like people condemned to death, in silence, glass for glass, till we have imbibed the requisite quantity; then we begin to laugh and jest with the utmost heartiness at what we describe as our sentimentality.

We laugh because we cannot weep. Ah! what could draw a tear from my exhausted eyes?

Why had I so much pleasure that evening? It would be difficult for me to say. Yet I was the same man and Rosette the same woman. It was not the first occasion we had ridden together. We had previously seen the sun set, and the spectacle had no more touched us than the sight of an admirable picture with its brilliant colors. There is more than one avenue of elms and chestnut trees in the world and that was not the first occasion we had traversed it; what then caused us to discover such a sovereign charm, which transformed dead leaves into topaz and green foliage into emerald, which gilded all these fluttering fragments, and changed into pearl all the drops of water scattered over the green-sward, which gave such sweet harmony to the sounds of a usually discordant bell and to the chirps of all kinds of little birds? There must have been most penetrating poetry in the air, since even our steeds seemed to feel its effects.

Nothing in the world, however, could have been simpler and more pastoral: a few trees, clouds, five or six branches of foliage, a woman, and a ray of sunshine falling upon a scene like a golden chevron upon a coat of arms. Nor did I have any feeling of surprise or astonishment. I well remember it all. I never afterwards visited that spot without perfectly recollecting the shape of the foliage, the position of the clouds, the white pigeon which crossed the sky flying in the same direction; the little silvery bell I then heard for the first time had often tinkled in my ear, and its voice seemed to me like that of a friend; I had, without ever going there, traversed that avenue many times with princesses mounted upon unicorns; the most voluptuous of my dreams had been located there every evening, and my desires had there exchanged kisses just like the one I exchanged with Rosette. That kiss had nothing new to me in it, for it was just as I thought it would be. It was perhaps the only time in my life that I was not disappointed, when the reality appeared to me as beautiful as the ideal. If I could find a woman, a landscape, a building, something answering to my inmost desires as perfectly as that moment agreed with the

minute of my dreams, I should have no cause of envy against the gods, and I would most willingly give up my seat in Paradise. But, in reality, I do not think that a man of flesh and blood could resist for an hour such penetrating pleasure; two kisses like that would comprise an entire existence, and would create a complete void in soul and body. That consideration would not stop me; for being unable to prolong my life indefinitely, death is of no concern to me, and I should prefer to die of pleasure than of age or ennui.

But this woman does not exist. If she exists, I am perhaps only separated from her by a partition. I have perhaps touched her in passing, either yesterday or to-day.

How does Rosette differ from such a woman? My belief that she is the woman is all that is lacking. What fatality is it that always makes me have love affairs with women I do not love? Her neck is polished for the most beautiful necklaces, her fingers are sufficiently tapered to do honor to the richest and most beautiful rings, rubies would blush with pleasure at being allowed to gleam at the pink tip of her beautiful ear, her waist would do honor to the cestus of Venus; but it is Love alone who knows how to fasten his mother's sash.

All Rosette's merit is in herself. I have lent her nothing. I have not thrown over her beauty that veil of perfection with which love envelops the person of the beloved; the veil of Isis is transparency by the side of it. Satiety is the only thing which can lift the corner of it.

I do not love Rosette; at least, the love I have for her, if I have any, does not resemble the idea that I am made for love. After all my idea is not perhaps right. I dare decide nothing. Still, it makes me quite insensible to the charms of other women, and I have thought of no one else since I have known her. If she has cause for jealousy, it is only of phantoms, and they are unlikely to cause her much uneasiness; my imagination is her most dangerous rival, though, with all her cleverness, she will probably never perceive it.

If women knew that! How many infidelities the least flighty lover commits against his most beloved mistress! It is to be presumed that women do likewise, or even worse;

but, like us, they say nothing. A mistress is like an ordinary theme, which usually disappears beneath flourish and improvisation. Often the kisses she receives are not for her; it is the idea of another woman that is kissed in her person, and she benefits more than once (if it can be called a benefit) by thoughts inspired by others. Ah! poor Rosette, how many times have you served as the incarnation for my dreams and given a reality to your rivals; of how many infidelities have you unwittingly been the accomplice! If you could have thought at the moment my arms embraced you so tightly, when my mouth was pressed against your own, that your beauty and love were of no value, that your features were a thousand miles away from my thoughts; if you had been told that those eyes, veiled with amorous languor, were cast down in order not to see you, and not to dispel the illusion that you only served to complete, and that you were only an effort of my imagination, a means of deceiving a desire impossible of realization!

O heavenly creatures, beautiful virgins, frail and diaphanous, who droop your eyes and clasp your lily hands upon the golden-framed pictures of the old German masters, you saints in stained-glass windows, you martyrs from the missals who smile so gently in the midst of scrolls of arabesques, and who emerge so blonde and fresh from the bell of flowers! O you beautiful courtesans, reclining upon beds strewn with roses, beneath large purple curtains, with your bracelets and necklaces of great pearls, your fan and your mirrors, in which the setting sun is reflected amid the shadows! dark daughters of Titian, who display your beautiful figures so voluptuously! ancient goddesses whose white phantoms hover 'neath the shades of the garden, you are all part of my seraglio; I have adored you all in turn. Saint Ursula, I have kissed your hands in Rosette's beautiful hands; I have played with the dark hair of Muranese, and never before had Rosette so much difficulty in rearranging her hair. Virgin Diana, I have been your admirer more than Actæon, and I have not been changed into a stag; I it was who replaced your beautiful Endymion! How many unsuspected rivals there are,

against whom no revenge is possible! But still are they not always painted or sculptured!

Women, when you see your lover become more tender than usual and clasp you in his arms with extraordinary emotion; when he raises his head to gaze upon you with humid and wandering eyes; when enjoyment only serves to increase his tenderness, and he drowns your voice beneath his kisses, as if he feared to listen to it, be sure that he is not aware of your presence; that he is keeping an appointment with a chimera which you render palpable by playing its part. Many chambermaids have profited by the love inspired by queens. Many women have profited by the love inspired by goddesses, and a commonplace reality has often served as the pedestal for the ideal idol. That is why poets usually have such commonplace love-affairs. There is the story of many great geniuses whose ignoble and obscure relations have made the world astonished.

I have only been unfaithful to Rosette after this fashion. I have only deceived her with pictures and statues, and she has contributed a half to my treachery. I have not upon my conscience the tiniest material transgression with which to reproach myself. I am, in this respect, as white as the snow upon the Jungfrau, and yet without being amorous of any one, I desire to be so. I do not look for an opportunity, nor should I be angry if it presented itself; if it came, perhaps I should not make use of it, for I have an inner conviction that it would be just the same with another; now, in this woman I have at least a pretty and witty comrade, and one most agreeably demoralized, and that consideration is not one of the least of the ties which bind me to her, for in losing the woman, I should be in despair at the loss of the friend.

CHAPTER IV

Do you know that for five months, which seem like five eternities, I have been Madam Rosette's devoted admirer? That is very fine. I should not have believed myself so faithful, nor would she, I would wager. We are indeed a pair of turtle-doves in our affection.

It has been a five-months' *tête-à-tête* for we meet every day, and almost every evening, with the doors closed against other visitors. Ah, well, one thing I must say to the glory of the incomparable Rosette, I am not greatly bored, and this time will, no doubt, be the most agreeable of my life. I do not think it possible for any woman to occupy in a more constant and amusing fashion a man without passion, and God knows what a terrible disenchantment is that produced by an empty heart! I can give you no idea of this woman's resources. She began by taking them from her mind, and ended by doing so from her heart, for she loves me to adoration. With what art does she profit by the tiniest spark, and how she can make it flame! How skillfully she directs the tiniest movements of the soul! How she can convert languor into tender reverie! and by how many devious methods can she bring back to herself the mind which is far away! It is wonderful! I admire her as one of the greatest geniuses who has ever lived.

I have before now visited her in a very bad temper, with the object of a quarrel. I do not know how the witch has managed it, but at the end of a few minutes she has forced me to pay her compliments, although I had not the least desire to do so, to kiss her hands and laugh with all my might, although I was in a terrible rage. Can you form an idea of such tyranny? But however clever she may be, our *tête-à-tête* cannot be prolonged much further, and during the last fortnight I have done a thing I never did before, I have picked up a book from her table and read a few lines during the gaps in the conversation. Rosette has noticed it with a feeling of terror she has been unable to conceal, and she has

removed all books from her boudoir. I must admit that I regret their absence, though I cannot ask for them. The other day (a terrible symptom) some one came while we were together, and instead of flying into a rage as I used to do I felt almost glad. I was nearly amiable, and maintained the conversation which Rosette tried to make flag so that the gentleman would go, and when he had gone I even remarked that he was a clever fellow and good company. Rosette reminded me that two months before I considered him stupid and the greatest fool on earth, and to this I could make no reply, for I had indeed said so; and I was quite right, in spite of the apparent contradiction; for on the first occasion he had disturbed a charming conversation, and on the second he had come to the rescue of a worn-out and languishing (on one side, at any rate) talk, and was the means of sparing me, for that day, at any rate, my fatiguing part in a love scene.

That is the state of affairs; the position is a serious one, especially when one of the two is still in love and clinging desperately to the remnants of the other's affection. I am in a position of great perplexity. Although I am not in love with Rosette, I have a great affection for her, and would not like to do anything to cause her pain. I want her to believe as long as possible that I love her.

Out of gratitude for all those hours she has made pass so quickly, out of gratitude for the love she has given me, in return for pleasure, I desire it. I will deceive her; for is not an agreeable deception better than a painful truth—and I shall never have the heart to tell her I do not love her. The vain shadow of love on which she feasts appears so adorable and dear to her, she embraces the pale specter with so much intoxication and effusion, that I dare not make it vanish; yet I am afraid in the end she will perceive that it is only a phantom. This morning we had a talk, which I will report in dramatic form for greater fidelity, and which makes me fear that I shall not be able to prolong our liaison much further.

"Do not yawn like that"—Rosette is addressing me—"or I will not kiss you for a week."

"Well!"

"You don't seem sir, to place much value upon my kisses."

"On the contrary."

"You say that in a very unconcerned fashion. Very well, sir, you can be sure that for a week I will not touch you with my lips. To-day is Tuesday, so not till next Tuesday."

"Bah!"

"Why bah?"

"Yes, bah! You will kiss me before this evening or I shall die."

"You will die! What a coxcomb you are! I have spoiled you, sir."

"I shall live. I am not a coxcomb, and you have not spoiled me; quite the reverse. First of all, I demand the suppression of the 'sir'; I have known you long enough for you to call me by name."

"I have spoiled you, Albert."

"Good. Now bring your mouth nearer."

"No, Tuesday next."

"Come! do we now embrace calendar in hand? We are both of us a little too young for that. Your mouth, my child, or I shall get a stiff neck."

"No."

"Ah! you want me to steal my kiss, little one; it shall be done. The thing is feasible, though perhaps it has not yet been done."

"Saucy fellow!"

"Notice, my beautiful one, that I was gallant enough to put in a 'perhaps'; that is very honorable on my part. But we are wandering from our subject. Lean your head. Come. What is the matter, my favorite sultana? How cross you look! I want to kiss a smile, not a pout."

"How can you expect me to laugh?" Rosette replies as she leans forward to be kissed. "You speak so unkindly to me!"

"My intention is to utter the most loving words. Why do you think I am unkind to you?"

"I do not know; but you are."

"You mistake for unkindness meaningless jokes."

"Do you call that meaningless? Trifles mean so much in

love. I would rather you beat me than laugh as you are doing."

"Do you want to see me weep?"

"You always go from one extreme to the other. You are not asked to weep, but to talk reasonably, and to drop that quizzing tone which suits you so badly."

"It is impossible for me to talk reasonably and not to quiz; so I will beat you, as you prefer it."

"Go on."

"I would rather," I say, as I give her a few taps on the shoulders, "cut off my own head than spoil your lovely little body and mar the whiteness of your charming back. My goddess, whatever pleasure there may be in your being beaten, it shall not fall to your lot."

"You don't love me any longer."

"That does not follow at all directly from what has preceded it; that is almost as logical as saying, 'It rains, so don't give me my umbrella,' or 'It is cold, open the window.'"

"You do not love me, you have never loved me."

"Ah! things are becoming more complicated: 'You do not love me, you have never loved me.' That is passably contradictory. How can I cease to do a thing I have never done? You see, my little queen, you do not know what you are talking about, and all you say is perfectly absurd."

"I have such a desire to be loved by you that I have helped to delude myself. It is easy to believe what one desires to believe; but now I can clearly see I am mistaken. You have deceived yourself; you have acquired a taste for love, and a desire for passion. The same thing happens every day. I will not have it: it is not your fault you have not loved me; it is due to the poorness of my charms. I ought to be more beautiful, more sprightly, more coquettish; I ought to try and ascend to your level, my poet, instead of desiring to make you descend to mine. I have feared to lose you in the clouds, and I am afraid that your head has stolen away your heart from me. I have imprisoned you in my love, and I believed, in surrendering myself to you, that you would retain something."

"Rosette, move a little further away from me; your flesh burns me, you are like a hot coal."

"If I bore you, I will go away. Ah! heart of rock, drops of water penetrate stone, but my tears cannot penetrate you." (She weeps.)

"If you weep like that, you will change the place into a bathroom, or rather, the ocean. Can you swim, Rosette?"

"Wretch!"

"Come, why am I a wretch? You flatter me, Rosette; I have not that honor. I am a careless citizen, alas! I have not committed the smallest of crimes; I have perhaps done a foolish thing in loving you to distraction, that is all. Do you desire with all your strength to make me repent of my love? I have loved you, and I love you to the utmost extent of my power. Since I have been your lover I have always walked in your shadow. I have consecrated all my time to you, my days and my evenings. I have not used long phrases to you, because I only like them when they are written; but I have given you a thousand proofs of my affection. I will not mention my scrupulous fidelity, that is understood; what more would you have of me? I am with you to-day, as I was yesterday, and shall be to-morrow. Is this the way a man behaves to a woman he does not love? I do all you wish me to do. You say, 'Let us go,' I go; 'let us stay,' and I remain; it seems to me that I am the most admirable lover in the world."

"That is precisely my complaint; in truth, you are the most perfect lover in the world."

"With what have you to reproach me?"

"Nothing, and I should prefer to have to complain of you."

"This is a strange quarrel."

"It is much worse. You do not love me. I can do nothing; nor can you. What would you do under these circumstances? Most certainly I should prefer to have some fault to pardon. I should scold you; you would do your best to excuse yourself, and we should make it up."

"That would be to your advantage. For the greater the crime, the greater would the reparation be."

"You know very well, sir, that I am not yet reduced to that extreme, and that if I wished now, although you do not love me, and we were to quarrel . . ."

"Yes, I admit it is the result of pure clemency on your part. Then spare me a little; that would be better than arguing in the way we are doing."

"You wish to cut short a conversation which embarrasses you; but, if you please, my fine friend, we will be content with talking."

"That is not a very extravagant luxury. I assure you that you are wrong; you are ravishingly pretty, and I have a great affection for you."

"Which you shall express to me on a future occasion."

"Well, my love, are you really a little Hyrcanian tigress? Your cruelty is unparalleled! Has a longing to make yourself a vestal taken possession of you? The caprice would be quite original."

"Why not? Stranger things have happened; but most certainly I shall be as far as you are concerned. Learn, sir, that I only love those who love me, or whom I believe do so. You are in neither class. Allow me to leave you."

"Let me go!"

"No, I will not."

"Madam, I assure you, I will not."

"Ah, well! I will remain." Rosette has not realized that she is the weaker of the two. "You are hurting my arm."

"I think you know quite well without me telling you; besides, it is a little late to capitulate when the enemy has already captured the citadel."

Here, old friend, I think it will not be out of place to conclude the dialogue, for the remainder of it can hardly be reported.

After lunching together, as it was a bright, sunny day, we went for a long country ramble. The clearness of the air, the splendor of the countryside, and the aspect of joyful nature introduced into the soul enough sentimentality and tenderness to make Rosette admit that my heart, was the same as another person's.

Have you ever noticed how the shade of the woods, the

murmur of the waterfalls, the song of the birds, and the odor of the foliage and flowers exercise over us, however depraved we may be, an occult power which it is impossible to resist? I will confide in you, under a vow of the greatest secrecy, that I quite recently surprised myself by displaying the most provincial emotion at the song of the nightingale. It was in a garden; the sky, though it was night, had a clearness almost equal to that of the brightest day; it was so profound and transparent that one's gaze penetrated almost to God. One could seem to see fluttering the folds of angels' robes upon the white curves of the way of Saint Jacques. The moon was up, but entirely hidden by a tree; it riddled the black foliage with thousands of little luminous holes, giving it more sparkles than ever had any Marquise's fan. Although I could see only the bluey light of the moon, I seemed to be surrounded by a population of unknown but beloved phantoms, and I did not feel alone, though I was the only person upon the terrace. I did not think, I did not dream, I was bewildered by the nature surrounding me, I felt myself rustle with the foliage, shimmer with the water, and blossom with the flowers; I was nothing more than the trees, the water, and the beauty of the night. I was all that, and I do not think it possible to be further from myself than I was at that moment. Suddenly, as if something extraordinary were about to happen, the leaves were still upon the branches, the drops of water from the fountain remained suspended in the air and did not complete their fall. The silver rays of the moon still fell upon the earth; my heart also beat so loudly that it seemed to fill the gardens with sound. Then my heart ceased to throb, and there was a great silence amid which I could hear the grass grow and a whisper two hundred leagues away. Instantly the nightingale, probably awaiting such a moment to commence his song, hurled forth from his little throat a note so shrill and clear that I heard it in my breast as much as through my ears. The music suddenly filled the crystal sky void of sound, and made a harmonious atmosphere, in which the other notes as they followed hovered as if upon wings. I understood as perfectly what the songster was saying as if I had mastered the secret of the

birds' language. It was the story of loves I have missed the nightingale was telling. Never was a story more exact or truthful. He did not omit the tiniest detail or the smallest shade of expression. He told me what I had not been able to tell myself, he explained to me what I had not been able to understand; he gave a voice to my reverie, and gained an answer from the phantom which, up to that time, had been mute. I knew that I was loved, and his most languorous roulade told me that I should soon be happy. I seemed to see amid the trills of his song, and beneath the rain of notes, in a ray of moonlight, the white arms of my well-beloved outstretched towards me. She appeared gradually, with the perfume of the heart of a hundred-leaved rose. I will not try to describe to you her beauty. It was of the sort words refuse to depict. How can I utter the unutterable, how paint that which has neither form nor color, or how note a voice without tone or words? Never before have I had so much love in my heart; I would have clasped Nature to my breast. I pressed the void between my arms as if it were a virgin's waist; I gave kisses to the air as it passed by my lips. Ah! if Rosette had been there, how happy should I have been! But women never appear at the right time. The nightingale ceased to sing; the moon, unable longer to refrain from sleep, drew over her eyes a nightcap of clouds, and I left the garden; for the chill of the evening had begun to affect me.

My mistress and I still have agreeable moments, but they have to be brought about and prepared by some external circumstance, like the nightingale's song; and yet, in the beginning, I had no need to excite my imagination by looking at the moon and listening to the nightingale to enjoy all the pleasure possible to a person not really in love.

Rosette, who is still in love, does what she can to combat these disadvantages. Unfortunately, there are two things in the world which cannot be commanded: love and ennui. On my part I make superhuman efforts to overcome the somnolence which attacks me in spite of myself, and, like the country folk who begin to nod at ten o'clock in a fashionable drawing-room, I keep my eyes as wide open as possible and

lift up my eyelids with my fingers! but it is all of no avail.

The dear child, who the other day hit upon a rural scheme, took me into the country yesterday.

It would perhaps be as well for me to give you a description of the aforesaid country, for it is pretty enough in its way; it will also brighten up a little all my metaphysics, and besides I need a background for the persons, as figures cannot stand out from a void or from that vague brown color with which painters fill up their canvas.

The approaches are very picturesque. Along a high road, bordered with trees, a spot is reached where several paths meet, and here stands a stone obelisk surmounted by a bowl of gilded copper. Five paths converge; then there is a sudden dip in the ground. The high road plunges down into a narrow valley, the bottom of which is occupied by a stream, which it crosses by means of a single-arch bridge, then ascends steeply the opposite slope, where a village is situated, the church tower of which can be seen peeping between the thatched roofs and the rounded tops of the apple trees. The horizon is not very vast, for it is bounded on two sides by the crest of the hill, but it is pleasant and restful to the eye. By the side of the bridge there is a mill, and a red sandstone building in the form of a tower; an almost continuous barking and the presence of a few hounds and several young dachshunds lying in the sun before the door would inform one that here lives the gamekeeper, if the buzzards and weasels nailed to the shutters could leave any doubt on the subject. Here an avenue of mountain ashes begins, the scarlet berries of which attract flocks of birds. As the passers-by are few there is a white track in the middle of the road; all the rest is covered with a short, fine moss, and in the double cart-track little frogs as green as lizards croak and jump. After a considerable walk we come to an iron gate, which was once gilt and painted, and the sides of which are ornamented with spiked railings. Then the road winds towards the château, which is not yet visible, for it is hidden away in the foliage like a bird's nest, often turning aside to visit a stream or a fountain, an elegant kiosk, or a spot from which a beautiful view is obtainable, and crossing and

recrossing the river over Chinese or rustic bridges. The hilly nature of the ground and the dams made for the mill cause the river in several places to fall a distance of four or five feet, and nothing is more pleasant than to hear all these cascades purling close at hand, very often without being able to see them, for the rushes and osiers form an almost impenetrable screen. But all this part of the park is in some respects but the ante-room of the rest; a high road which passes through the estate unfortunately divides it into two parts, but this inconvenience has been remedied in a very ingenious way. Two high walls, with battlements full of loopholes in imitation of a ruined fortress, stand one on either side of the road; a tower to which giant ivy clings on the château side drops with iron chains upon the bastion opposite a real drawbridge, and this bridge is let down every morning. Through a beautiful archway one can pass into the interior of the dungeon, and thence into the second domain, where the trees, which have not been cut for a century, are of extraordinary height, and having their gnarled trunks covered by parasite plants, are the strangest and most beautiful I have ever seen. Some have leaves only at the tops, which are umbrella-shaped; others taper in tufts; others, on the contrary, have not far from their roots a large clump, from which the bare trunk rises to the sky like a second tree planted in the first; such curious deformity do they display, that they seem like the drawings of an artificial landscape or theatrical scenery; ivy which trails from one to the other mingles its dark foliage with the green leaves, of which it seems to be the shadow. Nothing in the world is more picturesque. The river widens out at this spot to form a small lake, and its shallowness makes visible through the transparent water the beautiful aquatic plants which carpet its bed. The château is on the other side, but a little boat, painted apple-green and bright red, will save a long detour in search of the bridge. The mansion is a collection of buildings erected at different periods, with irregular gables and a number of little bell-turrets.

In spite of a lack of regularity, or rather because of it, the appearance of the building is charming; at least it can-

not all be seen at once; there is plenty of choice, and always something fresh to notice. This mansion, which I did not know, for it is twenty leagues away, at once took my fancy, and I realized at once Rosette's perfect taste and triumphant idea in selecting such a nest for our love.

We reached it at nightfall, and, as we were tired, after a hearty supper we had nothing better to do than to go to bed, for we intended to have a good night's rest.

My dreams were of a rose-colored nature, full of flowers, perfumes, and birds, when I felt a warm breath upon my forehead and a kiss descend upon my lips. The sound of the kiss and a sweet moisture upon my lips made me realize that I was not dreaming; I opened my eyes, and the first thing I saw was Rosette's fresh white neck as she leant over the bed to embrace me. I put my arm around her waist, and returned her kiss more lovingly than I had done for a long time.

She drew back the curtain and opened the window, and then sat down upon the edge of my bed, holding my hand in hers and playing with my rings. Her attire, which was most coquettish in its simplicity, made me regret that I was already her lover, and had not still to become so.

My dream at the moment she awakened me in such an agreeable fashion was not far removed from reality. My room looked out upon the little lake I described just now. Jessamine encircled my window, and shed its blossoms in a silver rain upon my floor; large foreign flowers blossomed upon my balcony; a sweet, faint perfume, composed of a thousand different scents, penetrated as far as my bed, from which I could see millions of drops of water shimmer and sparkle; the birds sang and twittered, there was a harmony of confused sounds like the noise at a fair. Facing me upon a hillside lit up by the sun stretched a meadow of a golden green, where a few oxen in the care of a small boy grazed here and there. Higher up and further away were visible immense patches of woods of a darker green, from which ascended in spirals the bluey smoke of charcoal-burners' fires.

The entire landscape was calm, fresh, and smiling, and wherever I turned my eyes, everything looked young and

beautiful. My room was hung with tapestry and had mats upon the floor, while blue Japanese vases, large in the body with slim necks, full of strange flowers, were artistically arranged upon the shelves and marble mantelpiece; there were pictures, too, representing pastoral and rural scenes, and sofas and divans in every corner; then, last of all, there was a young and beautiful woman, all in white, whose flesh delicately tinted her transparent garment at the places where it touched her. Nothing could be imagined more conducive to the pleasure of the soul as well as the eye.

So my delightful eye travelled with equal pleasure from a magnificent vase, decorated with dragons and mandarins, to Rosette's slippers, and from there to the corner of her shoulder shining beneath the cambric; it rested upon the trembling blossoms of the jasmine and the willows on the river-bank, passed over the water and explored the hillside, and then returned into the room to become fixed upon the rose-colored knots of a shepherdess's long corset.

Through the gaps in the foliage the sky showed thousands of blue specks; the water babbled gently; and I gave way to the appreciation of all this joy in silence, plunged in a tranquil ecstasy, with my hand still clasped in Rosette's little hands.

The expression that happiness is red and white is a fine one; it can hardly be represented otherwise. Tender colors suit it well. There are only upon its palette a water-green, sky-blue, and a straw-colored yellow; its pictures are all in the light, like those of Chinese painters. Flowers, light perfumes, a silky and soft skin touching your own, veiled harmony, coming from you know not where, these things are quite enough for happiness; there is no different way of being happy. I, who have a horror of the commonplace, who dream of nothing but strange adventures, violent passions, delirious ecstasies, strange and difficult situations, am supremely happy in this fashion, and, with all my efforts, I have been unable to find any other.

I must ask you to believe that I did not then make any of these reflections; afterwards, when writing to you, they have come into my head; at that moment I was entirely wrapped

up in my enjoyment—the only occupation of a reasonable man.

I will not describe to you the life we lead here; you can easily imagine it. There are walks in the great woods, violets and wild strawberries, kisses and little blue flowers, picnics on the grass, reading and books forgotten beneath the trees; excursions on the water with the end of a scarf or a white hand trailing in the stream, lengthy songs or peals of laughter re-echoed by the bank; we lead the most Arcadian life it is possible to imagine.

Rosette overwhelms me with caresses and attentions; more loving than a dove in the month of May, she winds herself around my heart, and entwines me in her coils; she tries to prevent me breathing any other atmosphere than her breath, or seeing any other horizon than her eyes; she besieges me very closely, and allows nothing to enter or leave without permission; she has built a little fortress by the side of my heart, from which she watches night and day. She uses the most loving expressions to me; she sings love-songs to me; she sits upon my knees, and behaves in my presence like a humble slave in the presence of her lord and master. Now this pleases me, for I love such submissive ways, as I have an inclination towards Oriental despotism. She does not take the slightest step without asking my advice, and seems to have made a complete abnegation of her own fancies and her own will; she tries to guess my thoughts and anticipate them; her tenderness and complaisance is absolutely wearying; she is perfection personified. How shall I be able to leave such an adorable woman without seeming like a monster? It will always be a discredit to my heart.

Oh! how I should like to find her out in a fault or a mistake! How impatiently I wait for an opportunity to quarrel! But there is no fear of the wretch giving me the chance! When, to provoke an altercation, I speak to her sharply, she answers me in such gentle tones, with such a silvery voice, with eyes so moist, an air so sad and so loving, that I seem to myself more like a tiger or a crocodile, and, though in a rage, I am forced to beg her pardon.

She literally assassinates me with love. She probably de-

sires to make me tell her that I detest her, that she bores me to death, and that if she does not leave me alone I will strike her in the face with a whip. She will reduce me to this, if she continues to be so amiable, and it will not take long.

In spite of all this beautiful outward appearance, she is surfeited of me as I am of her; but, as she has committed the most egregious follies for me, she does not desire, in the eyes of the honorable corporation of sensible women, to put herself in the wrong by a rupture. Every grand passion pretends to be eternal, and it is very advantageous to reap the benefit of this eternity without having to endure its discomforts. Rosette argues like this: "Here is a young man who has only a slight taste remaining for me, and as he is naïve and good-natured, he does not dare openly to show it, and does not know of what wood to make the arrow; it is obvious that I bore him, but he will rather die of ennui than take upon himself to leave me. As he is something of a poet, he has a head full of beautiful phrases on love and passion, and believes himself obliged in his conscience to be a Tristan or an Amadis. Now, as nothing in the world is more unbearable than the caresses of a person for whom one's love has ceased (and to cease to love a woman is to hate her violently), I am going to lavish my favors upon him so as to satiate him in every way, or force him either to send me away or return to his former love for me, and the latter he will carefully refrain from doing.

Nothing could be better planned. Is it not charming to play the part of the forlorn Ariadne? She is pitied and admired, while there are not sufficient imprecations in the world to bestow upon the wretch who has been monstrous enough to abandon such an adorable creature. The lady assumes a sorrowful and resigned air, puts her hand beneath her chin and her elbow on her knee in such a way as to make the pretty blue veins upon her wrist stand out. Her hair is arranged in a more subdued fashion, and for a time she wears dresses of a darker shade. The wretch's name is studiously avoided, but roundabout allusions are made to him to an accompaniment of admirably modulated sighs.

A woman so good, so beautiful, and so passionate, who has

made such great sacrifices, who is absolutely without reproach, a pearl of love, a polished mirror, a drop of milk, a white rose, an ideal essence to perfume a life; a woman who ought to be worshipped on bended knee, and, after death, should be cut up into small pieces as holy relics! How can a man desert such a one basely, fraudulently, and ungratefully? A pirate could not do worse! It is like striking her a death-blow! for she will most certainly die. A man must have a stone in the place of a heart to behave in such a way.

O men! men!

I say to myself: "But perhaps it is not true."

Great comediennes though women are by nature, I can hardly believe them as great as that, and after all, are Rosette's demonstrations the exact expression of her sentiments for me? Whatever the case may be, the continuation of our *tête-à-tête* is no longer possible, and the beautiful Lady of the Manor has at least issued invitations to her neighbors. We are engaged in preparing for the reception of these worthy country-folk. Good-by, old friend.

CHAPTER V

I WAS mistaken. My wicked heart, incapable of love, imagined the reason to free itself from the weight of a gratitude it did not wish to bear; I had joyfully seized upon that idea to excuse myself in my own eyes; I clung to it, but nothing in the world was more false. Rosette was not playing a part, and if ever a woman was true, she is that one. Ah well! I am almost angry with her for the sincerity of her passion, for it is one more tie, and renders a rupture even more difficult and less excusable; I would prefer that she were false and flighty. What a singular position to be in! I should like to go away, yet I stay; I should like to say, "I hate you"; yet I say, "I love you." My past pushes me forward, and prevents me from turning back or from stopping. I am faithful, with

regrets for being so. I do not know what sort of shame it is which entirely prevents my engaging in other love affairs, and compels me to enter into a composition with myself; I give to one all that I can, while maintaining appearances, steal from the other; the time and opportunities of meeting, which formerly arose so naturally, now only occur with difficulty. I begin to remember that I have important business. Such a situation as the above is very painful, but is not as bad as the one I am in. When a new friendship attracts one from the old it is easier to free oneself. Hope smiles sweetly at a man from the threshold of the house containing his young love. An illusion, fairer and more rosy, hovers with white wings over the freshly closed tomb of a sister just dead; another flower, more beautiful and scented, upon which trembles a heavenly tear, has suddenly blossomed from among the dead petals of the old bouquet; beautiful azure perspectives open before one; moist and quiet avenues stretch away to the horizon; there are gardens with pale statues, or benches standing near an ivy-covered wall, meadows studded with marguerites, narrow balconies where people lean and gaze at the moon, shady nooks intersected by furtive lights, drawing-rooms with the daylight excluded by their ample curtains; all the darkness and isolation sought by the love which dare not display itself is there. A feeling like a new youth comes. There is something else besides the change of places, habits, and persons; there is a feeling of remorse. But the desire which hovers around one's head, like a bee in the spring, prevents its voice from being heard; the void in the heart is filled, and memories are effaced by impressions. But in this case it is not the same thing; I love no one, and it is only out of weariness and ennui of myself rather than of her that I wish to break with Rosette.

My former ideas, which had been somewhat allayed, have become more pronounced than before. I am, as formerly, tormented with a desire to have a mistress, and, as before, even in Rosette's arms, I doubt whether I have ever had one. I see again the fair dame at her window in her park in the days of Louis XIII, and the lady following the chase on her white horse at a gallop through the forest rides. My ideal

beauty smiles at me from the clouds, while I think I can recognize her voice in the song of the birds and the murmur of the foliage; I seem to be called on all sides, and the daughters of the air appear to brush my face with their invisible scarves. Just as in the days of my agitation, I think that if I set off at once and go somewhere far away, and very quickly, I shall reach a place where something is taking place which concerns me and where my destiny is decided. I feel that I am impatiently expected in some corner of the earth, I know not where. A suffering soul eagerly calls, and dreams of me without being able to come to me; that is the cause of my uneasiness and the reason I am unable to remain in my place; I am violently attracted outside my center. My nature is not one of those which lead others, one of those fixed stars around which the other lights revolve; I must wander through the firmament like an irregular meteor, till I meet the planet whose satellite I am designed to be, the Saturn to whom I must add my ring. Oh, when will this hymen take place? Till then I cannot hope for rest or my proper position, and I shall be like the needle of a compass seeking its pole.

I thought I could fly away from this treacherous birdlime with the loss of a feather or two, and I hoped to be able to take wing when I chose. Nothing is more difficult; I find that I am covered by an imperceptible net, more difficult to break than the one forged by Vulcan, and its meshes are so fine that escape is impossible. The net, too, is large, and I can move about inside it with what appears to be perfect freedom; it is scarcely noticeable till I try to break it; but then it resists, and becomes as solid as a brass wall.

What time have I wasted, O my ideal, without making the slightest effort towards your realization! How have I in cowardly fashion accepted my passing pleasure, and how little do I deserve to meet you!

Sometimes I think of forming another liaison, but I have no one in view; more often I propose, if I should succeed in breaking my bonds, to never again become entangled in such ties, and yet nothing justifies that resolution, for this affair has apparently been very happy, and I have not the slightest complaint in the world to make against Rosette. She has al-

ways been good to me, and no one could have behaved better; her fidelity has been exemplary, and has not even given ground for suspicion; the most observant and suspicious jealousy could have found nothing to arouse distrust. Jealousy could only be possible with regard to the past then, it is true, there would be very good grounds for it. But a jealousy of this sort is a delicacy fortunately rare, and there is usually enough in the present without searching among the relics of old passions to extract phials of poison and cups of bitterness. What woman could a man love if he thought of all that? In a confused fashion a man knows that a woman has had several lovers before him; but he tells himself—such tortuous windings and coils has a man's pride, that he is the first she has really loved, and it was by a combination of fatal circumstances she became entangled with persons unworthy of her, or else that hers was the vague desire of a heart which sought to satisfy itself, and which changed because the desire was not realized.

Perhaps it is only possible to really love a virgin both in body and in mind, a frail bud which has not been caressed by any zephyr, whose locked breast has neither received a rain-spot nor a dewdrop, a chaste flower, which only displays its white robe for one alone, a beautiful lily with a silver bell, where desire has never yet dwelt, which has only been gilded by one sun, swayed by one breath, and watered by one hand. The brightness of midday is not so beautiful as the divine pallor of the dawn, and all the ardor of an experienced soul, well knowing life, yields to the celestial ignorance of a young heart awakening to love. Ah! how bitter and painful is the thought that one is wiping away the kisses of another, that there is, perhaps, no spot upon that brow, upon those lips, upon that throat, upon those shoulders, upon the whole of that body now one's own, which has not been reddened and marked by the lips of others; that those divine murmurs which come to the tongue's aid when words fail have already been heard; that those emotional senses have learned from another their ecstasy and delirium, and that deep down, far away in a remote corner of that soul, an inexorable memory watches and compares the pleasures of the past with those of to-day.

Although my natural nonchalance leads me to prefer high roads to unbeaten tracks, and the public drinking-fountain to the mountain spring, I must absolutely endeavor to love some virginal creature as white as the snow and as tremulous as the sensitive plant, one who only knows how to blush and lower her eyes; perhaps from this limpid stream into which no diver has yet descended I shall obtain a pearl of the first water, a worthy companion to Cleopatra's gem; but to do so I must break the tie which binds me to Rosette, or it is probably not with her that I shall realize this desire, and that I do not feel to have the strength to do.

Then too, if I must admit it, there is in my mind a secret and shameful motive which dare not be seen in broad daylight, but one which I must tell you, as I have promised to conceal nothing, and also for the reason that a confession to be meritorious must also be complete; this motive is of considerable moment in my uncertainty. If I break with Rosette, some time must of necessity elapse before I can replace her, however indulgent the class of women may be among whom I shall seek a successor, and I have acquired with her a habit of pleasure which it will be painful for me to suspend. It is quite true that there are courtesans, and formerly I loved them; but to-day they disgust me horribly and give me a nausea. So that alternative is out of the question, and I am so enervated by pleasure, the poison has become so deeply insinuated into my bones, that I cannot bear the idea of being one or two months without a mistress. That is egoism of the worst sort; but I think, if they would be straightforward, the most virtuous could confess to things of a similar character.

That is the strongest tie of all, and but for it Rosette and I would have parted long ago. Then, too, it is such a wearisome business, making love to a woman, that I do not feel equal to it. To begin over again all the charming nothings I have uttered so often; to write and reply to billets-doux; to see beauties home in the evening, perhaps miles away from one's own dwelling; to get cold feet and catch a chill at a window watching a beloved form; to calculate upon a sofa how many overlying tissues separate me from my goddess; to be the bearer of bouquets and a frequenter of balls in order to reach

the position I am in at present, all this will be labor indeed! It is as well to remain in one's groove as to emerge from it and after much agitation and trouble to return to another precisely similar one. If I were in love matters would arrange themselves, and it would all appear delightful to me; but I am not, although I have the greatest possible desire to be; for after all, love is the only thing in the world; and then, if pleasure which is only its shadow has so much allurements for us, what must the reality be? In what ocean of ineffable ecstasy, in what lake of pure delight must those swim who have been struck by one of the gold-tipped arrows and burn with the ardor of love!

I feel by Rosette's side that flat calm, that idle comfort which results from the satisfaction of the senses, but nothing more, and it is not enough. Often the voluptuous dullness turns to torpor and the tranquillity to ennui; I then drift into objectless distractions and all sorts of insipid dreams which fatigue and exhaust me; it is a state from which I must emerge at any cost.

Oh! If I could be like some of my friends, who kiss an old glove with rapture, who are quite happy with a clasp of the hand, who would not exchange for a sultana's casket of jewels a few faded flowers half dried by the heat of the ball, who cover with tears and sew into their shirt next their heart a stupid and commonplace note, who adore women with large feet and make the excuse for it that they have beautiful souls! If I could follow, trembling with excitement, the folds of a dress, wait for a door to open in order to see a beloved form pass in a flood of light; if a word whispered quite low made me change color; if I had the virtue of sacrificing my dinner in order to reach a rendezvous earlier; if I were capable of stabbing a rival, or of fighting a duel with a husband; if, by Heaven's special grace, it were given to me to consider the ugly women clever, and the ugly and stupid women good; if I could decide to dance the minuet, and to listen to sonatas played by young people on the harpsichord or on the harp; in short, if I were a man and not a poet, I should certainly be much happier than I am; I should be less bored and less wearisome.

I have never asked of women but one thing, beauty; I willingly pass over the soul and mind. To me a woman who is beautiful is always clever; she has the mind to be beautiful, and I do not know how much that is worth. It requires many brilliant phrases and scintillating flashes of wit to equal the glances from a beautiful eye. I prefer a pretty mouth to a well-turned phrase, and a well-modelled shoulder to a virtue, even a theological virtue; I would give fifty souls for a tiny foot, and all the poesy and poets for the hand of Jeanne d'Aragon or the forehead of the Virgin of Foligno. I adore above all things beauty of form; beauty to me is visible Divinity, palpable happiness, it is heaven come down to earth. There are certain undulating contours, a certain beauty of the lips, an inclination of the head which delight me beyond all expression and take my attention for hours at a time.

Beauty, the only thing which cannot be acquired, always inaccessible to those who do not have it from the first; an ephemeral and fragile flower which grows without being sown, a pure gift from Heaven! O beauty! the most radiant diadem with which chance can crown a brow, you are admirable and precious like everything at man's door, like the azure of the firmament, like the gold of a star, like the perfume of the seraphic lily! A man can exchange his labor for a throne; he may conquer the world—many have done it; but who would not kneel down before you, were you the pure personification of the thought of God?

I only demand beauty, it is true; but I require such perfect beauty that I shall probably never meet with it. I have here and there seen in a few women admirable parts only moderately accompanied, and I have loved them for their special beauty, ignoring the rest; at all times it is a painful and grievous task to in this way suppress half of a mistress, and make a mental amputation of all that is ugly or common about her, by concentrating the eyes upon her beautiful points. Beauty is harmony, and a person equally ugly everywhere is often less disagreeable to look at than a woman who is unequally beautiful. Nothing gives me so much pain as to see an uncompleted masterpiece and a beauty

which lacks something; an oil-stain is less obvious upon a common drugget than upon rich cloth.

Rosette is not bad. She might even pass as beautiful, but she is far from realizing my dream. She is a statue, several bits of which are very clearly developed. The others are not so striking; some parts are modelled with much skill and charm, while others are done in a more careless and loose fashion. To the ordinary observer the statue appears quite finished and complete in its beauty; but a more careful scrutiny soon discovers spots where the work is not concise enough, and contours which, to attain the purity proper to them, need the passing and repassing of the sculptor's finger many times.

Besides, I do not confine beauty within this or that sinuosity of lines. The manner, gestures, walk, breath, color, sound, perfume, in fact everything of which life consists, with me enters into the composition of beauty; everything which scents, sings, or gleams belongs to it by right. I love rich brocades, splendid stuffs, with their stiff, ample folds; I love large flowers, and their perfumes, the transparence of running water, and the glittering glory of beautiful weapons, thoroughbred horses, and those great white dogs we see in the pictures of Paul Veronese. I am a real pagan on this point, and I do not love the gods who are badly made. Although I am not at heart what might be called irreligious, no one in truth is a worse Christian than I am. I do not understand the mortification of matter which is the essence of Christianity; I consider it is a sacrilegious act to injure God's work, and I cannot believe that the flesh is evil, since He has fashioned it with His fingers in His own image. I have little esteem for the long, dark-colored garments from which only the head and two hands emerge, and those pictures where everything is buried in shadow except a gleaming forehead. I want the sun to enter everywhere, so that there may be the greatest possible amount of light and the least possible shadow. I like the sparkle of color, waving lines, the proud display of nudity, and no concealment of the existence of matter, since, like the mind, it is an eternal hymn in praise of God.

I can perfectly understand the mad enthusiasm of the Greeks for beauty; and on my own account I see nothing absurd in the law which obliged judges only to hear advocates' speeches in the dark, for fear that their handsome appearance, the grace of their gestures and attitudes should prejudice the judges in their favor, and bias their judgment.

I would not purchase anything from a merchant who was ugly; I give more freely to beggars whose rags and poverty are picturesque. There is a little restless Italian, sharp as a citron, with great black and white eyes which take up half his face, who always receives from me a penny more than the others. I would never hit a beautiful horse or fine dog, and I should not care for a friend or servant unless of agreeable appearance. It is a real punishment to me to see unpleasant things or ugly persons. A building in bad taste or an ill-shaped piece of furniture prevent me from being pleased in a house, however comfortable or attractive it may be in other respects. The best champagne seems to me almost like the commonest wine in an ill-shapen glass, and I must confess that I prefer the most Lacedæmonian broth in a china plate to the finest dish in an earthenware platter. Outside appearances have always had great weight with me, and and that is the reason I always avoid the company of the aged; they sadden me and disagreeably affect me because they are wrinkled and deformed, though some have a special beauty; and in the pity I feel for them there is much disgust: of all the ruins in the world, the ruin of man is certainly the saddest to contemplate.

If I were a painter (and I have always regretted that I am not) I would only people my canvases with goddesses, nymphs, Madonnas, cherubim, and Cupids. The consecration of one's brushes to the painting of portraits, unless of good-looking people, appears to me to be a crime against art; and far from desiring to copy ugly or ignoble faces, vulgar or insignificant heads, I would prefer to cut off the originals. The ferocity of a Caligula devoted in this direction would almost seem to me praiseworthy.

The only thing in the world I have envied is to be beautiful. I mean the beauty of a Paris or an Apollo. Not to be de-

formed, the possession of somewhat regular features, that is to say with a nose in the middle of the face, neither flat-nosed nor crooked-nosed, eyes neither red nor bloodshot, and a mouth of the proper size, is not beauty. If it were I should be beautiful, and yet I find myself as far from my ideal of manly beauty as if I were one of those figures which strike the hours upon bells; I should have a mountain upon each shoulder, the twisted legs of a dachshund, and the nose and muzzle of the monkey I should so much resemble. Many times have I looked at myself in a mirror for hours at the time, with a fixity and attention impossible to imagine, to see if any improvement has taken place in my face. I still hope that some spring or another I shall get rid of my present appearance, like a snake shedding its old skin. To think that it would take so little to make me handsome, and yet I never shall be. What difference would it make to the atoms composing me if they were crystallized in some other way? What difference would it make to a curve if it were altered, and where was the necessity for me as I am and not otherwise? Really, if I were to hold Fate by the throat, I think I should show no mercy. Because it pleased a miserable parcel of something to fall somewhere and clumsily coagulate into the ugly face I possess, I shall be eternally unhappy! Is it not the most foolish and miserable fate in the world? How does it come to pass that my soul, with the ardent desire which consumes it, cannot let fall the poor carrion which it holds upright, and animate one of those statues whose exquisite beauty saddens and delights it? There are two or three persons whom I would gladly murder, taking care not to disfigure them, if I possessed the secret of transferring a soul from one body to the other. It has always seemed to me that to do what I desire (and I do not know what that is) I need a great and perfect beauty, and I imagine that if I possessed it my life, which is so entangled and so worried, would have been complete.

So many beautiful faces are to be seen in pictures. Why is not mine one of them? There are so many charming heads which disappear beneath the dust and smoke of time in the

old galleries! Would it not be better for them to leave their frames and come to rest upon my shoulders?

My first sensation before one of those marvelous heads, whose painted gaze seems to penetrate one and extend into infinity, is a feeling of admiration not unaccompanied by terror; my eyes become moist, my heart beats; then, when I am a little familiarized with the picture, and have entered more deeply into the secret of its beauty, I tacitly compare it to myself. Jealousy writhes deep down in my soul in knots more twisted than a viper, and I have the greatest difficulty in preventing myself from rushing at the canvas and tearing it to bits.

To be beautiful is to have in yourself a charm which makes every one smile upon you and receive you; before you speak everybody is already prejudiced in your favor and disposed to be of your opinion; you have only to pass along a street or show yourself upon a balcony to create in the crowd friends or mistresses. Not to require to be amiable to be loved, to be spared all the expenditure of cleverness and complaisance to which ugliness obliges you, and of those thousand moral qualities it is necessary to have to supply the place of bodily beauty, prove what a splendid and magnificent gift beauty is.

What could a man desire more than to combine with extraordinary beauty supreme strength, to conceal beneath the skin of Antinous the muscles of Hercules? I am sure that with those two things and the soul I have, in less than three years I should be Emperor of the World! Another thing I have desired almost as much as beauty and strength is the gift of transporting myself as quickly as thought from one place to another. With an angel's beauty, a tiger's strength, and an eagle's wings, I should begin to find that the world is not as badly organized as I at first believed it to be. A beautiful mask to seduce and fascinate the prey, wings to pounce upon it and carry it off, and talons to tear it; till I have those three things I shall be unhappy.

Every passion and taste I have felt has only been a form of one of these three desires. I have loved arms, horses, and women: arms to replace the nerves I do not possess;

horses to serve as wings; women to possess at least in some one the beauty I myself lack. I sought out from preference weapons which were most ingeniously deadly and those whose wounds were incurable. I have never had occasion to make use of any of these creeses or yataghans, yet I love to have them around me. I draw them from the sheath with a feeling of security and inexpressible strength, I thrust and parry with them most energetically, and if by chance I catch sight of my face in a mirror I am astonished at its ferocious expression. As for horses, I override them so that they die. If I had not given up riding Farragus he would have been dead long ago, and that would have been a pity, for he is a fine animal. What Arab steed could have legs as swift and supple as my desire? With women I have only sought the exterior, and as up to the present those I have seen are very far from approaching my idea of beauty, I have fallen back on pictures and statues, which, after all, is a pitiable expedient when a person has such inflamed sensibilities as mine. Still there is something great and beautiful in loving a statue, for one's love is perfectly disinterested, and neither the satiety nor the disgust of victory is to be feared, nor can one reasonably expect a second prodigy like the story of Pygmalion. The impossible has always pleased me.

Is it not strange that I who am still in the fairest months of youth, who far from abusing everything have not even used the simplest things, have come to such a degree of ennui as to be only gratified by the strange or difficult? Satiety follows pleasure, that is a natural and quite intelligible law. For a man who has feasted to be no longer hungry, and to seek to arouse his palate by spices of irritant wines, is easy of explanation; but for a man who sits down to table, but hardly tastes the first course, to be seized with such superb disgust as to be unable to touch the finest dishes without vomiting, is a phenomenon which can only arise from a particular organization; it is like a child six months old finding its nurse's milk insipid and only wishing to partake of brandy. I am as weary as if I had accomplished all the marvels of Sardanapalus, and yet my life has been very

chaste and tranquil in appearance. It is a mistake to think that possession is the only road which leads to satiety. Desire too has the same effect, and abstinence exhausts more than excess. A desire like mine is more fatiguing than possession. Its gaze surveys and penetrates the object it wishes to have more promptly and profoundly than if it were actually touched. What more would practice teach? What experience can equal such constant and passionate contemplation?

I have engaged in so many pursuits though I have not traveled far, and it is only the steepest peaks which tempt me now. I am attacked by that malady which comes upon powerful men in the old age: the impossible. Everything I can do has not the least charm for me. Tiberius, Caligula, and Nero, mighty Romans of the Empire, you who have been so greatly misunderstood, and whom the pack of rhetoricians pursued with their yelps, I suffer from your malady, and I pity you with all the pity I have remaining in me! I too would like to build a bridge across the sea and pave the waves; I have dreamt of the burning of cities to illuminate my feasts; I have desired to be a woman to experience fresh pleasures. Your golden house, Nero, is but a dirty stable compared with the palace I have built for myself; my wardrobe is better equipped than yours, Heliogabalus, and splendid in a different fashion. My circuses are more noisy and bloodstained than yours, my perfumes stronger and more penetrating, while my slaves are more numerous and better built; I too have attached to my chariot naked courtesans, and I have walked upon men with a tread as disdainful as yours. Colossus of the ancient world, there beats within my weak frame a heart as great as yours, and had I been in your place I should have done the same, and perhaps more. How many Babels have I heaped up one upon the other to reach heaven, to strike the stars and spit down upon creation! Why then am I not God, since I cannot be a man?

Oh! I think I shall require a hundred thousand centuries of oblivion to rest me from the fatigues of my twenty years of life. God of heaven, what stone will You roll upon me, in what shadow will You plunge me, at what Lethe will

You make me drink, beneath what mountain will You inter the Titan? Am I destined to turn my mouth into a volcano, and when I turn over be the cause of earthquakes?

When I think of it, and that I was born of a sweet, resigned mother, with such simple tastes and habits, I am surprised that she can have contained me. How has it happened that none of her calm, pure thoughts have been transferred to my body with the blood she gave me? Why am I the son of her flesh only, not of her mind? The dove has brought forth a tiger, desiring the whole of creation as its prey.

I have lived in the calmest and most chaste environment. It is difficult to dream of an existence enshrined with such purity as mine. My years were spent under a mother's wing with my little sisters and the house dog. I only saw around me the good and gentle faces of the servants who had grown grey in a service which was often hereditary, relatives or friends, grave and thoughtful, dressed in black, who placed their gloves one by one beside their hats; I had a few aunts of uncertain age, plump, neat, discreet, with spotless linen, grey skirts, net mittens, and their hands upon their waistbelts like people of a religious turn of mind; the furniture of plain oak was so severe as to be almost mournful, the hangings were of leather, the whole comprising just such a somber and stifling interior as certain Flemish masters paint. The garden was damp and dark; the box which divided it into sections, the ivy covering the walls, and a few fir trees were charged with the representation of verdure, and succeeded badly enough; the brick house, with a very high roof, although spacious and in good condition, had something mournful and drowsy about it. Really, nothing could be more suitable to a separate, austere, and melancholy life than such a dwelling. It seemed impossible for all the children brought up in such a house not to become priests and nuns. Oh well, in this atmosphere of purity and repose, in this shadow and seclusion, I rotted bit by bit, without giving any outward sign, like a medlar on the straw. In the bosom of this honest, pious, and holy family I attained to a horrible degree of depravity. It was not the contact of the world, because I had not seen life, nor the fire of passion, since I

was paralyzed under the cold sweat which oozed from the strong walls. The maggot had not gone from the heart of another fruit to my heart. It had hatched of itself, and nothing from outside showed and warned me that I was spoiled. I had neither blemish nor hole; but I was quite hollow within. Is it not an inexplicable thing that a child born of virtuous parents, brought up with care and discretion, kept far away from all bad influence, can be perverted to such an extent and reach the state of mind I have done? I am sure that even by going back to the sixth generation it would not be possible to find among my ancestors a single atom like those of which I am composed. I am not a member of my family; I am not a branch of the noble trunk, but a poisonous fungus which sprang up one stormy night from amid its mossy roots. And yet no one has had more aspirations and impulses towards the beautiful than I, no one has tried more resolutely to unfold his wings; but each attempt has made me fall further, and that which ought to have been my salvation has been my ruin.

Solitude is worse for me than life, though I desire the first rather than the other. Everything which takes me out of myself is beneficial; society bores me, but drags me from my empty reverie. For that reason, since our *tête-à-tête* is disturbed, and there are people here with whom I am forced to restrain myself a little, I am less subject to giving way to my black humors, and I am less tortured by those unreasonable desires which fasten upon my heart like a flock of vultures as soon as I am idle for a moment. There are one or two rather pretty women, and one or two gay and jolly fellows; but among all these country-folk the one who pleases me most is a young gentleman who arrived two or three days ago; he pleased me from the first, and I opened my heart to him as I watched him dismount from his horse. It is impossible to be more graceful; he is not very tall, but slender and well developed; there is something soft and undulating in his gait and gestures, which could not possibly be more agreeable; while many women would envy him his hands and feet. His only fault is being too good-looking and having too delicate features for a man. He is blessed with

a pair of the blackest and most beautiful eyes in the world, with an indefinable expression in them and a look hard to bear; but as he is young and has no sign of a beard, the softness and perfection of the lower part of his face temper a little the vivacity of his eagle eyes; his brown shining hair hangs upon his neck in big curls, which give his head a particular character. Here then is one of the types of beauty of which I dreamed realized and walking in my presence! What a pity that he is a man, or that I am not a woman! This Adonis, who with his good-looking face has a keen and far-reaching intelligence, enjoys the advantage of having at the disposal of his wit a silvery and penetrating voice which it is difficult to hear without emotion. He is really perfect. It seems that he shares my taste for beauty, for his clothes are very rich and elaborate, and his horse is a very frisky and well-bred animal; and, to complete the picture, he was followed, mounted on a pony, by a page, fourteen or fifteen years of age, fair, rosy, and pretty as a seraph, who was half asleep and so tired by his ride that his master was obliged to lift him from the saddle and carry him to his room in his arms. Rosette gave him a most hearty reception, and I think she has planned to make use of him to arouse my jealousy, and thus fan into flame the smouldering ashes of my dying passion. Very dangerous though such a rival must be, I am but little disposed to be jealous, and I feel so drawn towards him that I would willingly desist from my love to have his friendship.

CHAPTER VI

HERE, if the easy-going reader will permit, we will for a time abandon to his reveries the worthy person who up to this time has occupied the stage by himself and spoken for himself, and return to the ordinary form of story, without preventing its taking the dramatic form where necessary,

and reserving to ourself the right of again borrowing the sort of epistolary confession that the above young man addressed to his friend.

The little page was so weary that he slept in his master's arms, and his little head wagged to and fro as if he were dead. It was some distance from the door to the room destined for the new arrival, and the servant who conducted him offered to carry the child; but the young fellow, who did not seem to feel the weight of his burden, thanked him without accepting his offer; he put the child gently down upon the couch, taking a thousand precautions not to awaken him; a mother could not have done more. When the servant had retired and the door was shut, he dropped down upon his knees and tried to remove his boots; but the little tired and swollen feet rendered this operation difficult, and from time to time the pretty sleeper uttered vague and inarticulate cries, like a person about to awaken; then the young fellow stopped and waited till he had gone to sleep again. At last the boots yielded, and then the stockings made but a poor resistance. After this operation the master took the child's two feet and placed them side by side upon the velvet of the sofa; they were the two most adorable feet in the world, white as new ivory and somewhat rosy from the pressure of the boots which had imprisoned them for seventeen hours; they were too tiny feet even for a woman, and seemed never to have walked; the visible part of the leg was round, plump, polished, transparent, veined, and of the most exquisite delicacy; a leg worthy of the foot.

The young man, still on his knees, contemplated the two little feet with amorous admiration; he leant over, took the left and kissed it, and then the right; and then, kiss by kiss, he ascended the leg as far as the clothing. The page opened his eyes, and gave his master a tired and grateful glance, which betrayed no surprise. "My sash hurts me," he said, as he put his finger under the ribbon and then fell fast asleep. The master unfastened the sash, raised the page's head with a cushion, and touching his feet, which were becoming a little cooler, carefully wrapped them in his cloak, took a chair, and sat down as near the sofa as possible. Two

hours passed in this way, the young man watching the child sleep, and following upon his forehead the shadows of his dreams. The only sound in the room was the regular breathing and the tick of the clock.

It was certainly a very pleasing picture. In the contrast of these two sorts of beauty there was an effect of which a clever painter would have made the greatest use. The master was as beautiful as a woman, the page as a young girl. The round and rosy head amid its hair was like a peach in its leaves; it had the freshness and softness, although the fatigue of the journey had taken away some of its usual brilliance; the half-open mouth showed little milk-white teeth, and beneath the full shining temples a network of azure veins appeared; the eyelashes, like the threads of gold around the virgins' heads in a missal, came almost to the middle of the cheeks; his long and silky hair had at the same time gold and silver tints in it—gold in the shadow and silver in the light; his neck was at once fat and frail, and had nothing of the sex indicated by the clothes about it; two or three buttons of the undershirt, undone to facilitate respiration, gave a glimpse of a square of plump and chubby flesh of admirable whiteness, and the beginning of a certain curve difficult to explain on the breast of a boy; on looking closely, it might have been also observed that the hips were a little too pronounced. The reader can think what he pleases; these are simply conjectures, for we know no more about it than he does, but we hope to learn more shortly, and we faithfully promise to make him aware of our discoveries.

The gentleman was pale, but it was a golden pallor, full of strength and life; his blue eyes and his straight, slender nose gave to his profile marvelous pride and vigor; his mouth at certain times had the sweetest of smiles, but usually it was curved at the corners, just as on those heads to be seen in the paintings of some of the old Italian masters, rather within than without; the effect of this was to give an adorably disdainful expression, and an air of childish pouting and ill humor, very strange and very charming.

What were the ties which united the master to the page

and the page to the master? Assuredly there was more between them than the affection existing between master and servant. Were they two friends or two brothers? Then why this disguise? It would have been difficult for any one who saw the scene we have just described to believe that these two persons were what they appeared to be.

"How the dear angel sleeps," said the young man in a low voice "I don't believe he ever traveled so far before. Twenty leagues on horseback; I am afraid it will make him ill with fatigue, for he is so delicate. No, by to-morrow all trace will have departed; he will have recovered his healthy color, and be fresher than a rose after the rain. How beautiful he is. If I were not afraid of waking him I would eat him up with caresses. What an adorable dimple he has on his chin! How fine and white his skin is! Sleep well, my treasure. Ah! I am really jealous of your mother, and I should like to have known her. Is he ill? No; his breathing is regular and he does not move. I think there was a knock at the door."

In reality there had been two taps, as gentle as possible, at the door.

The young man got up and, fearing he was mistaken, before opening the door waited for another knock. Two other taps, a little louder, sounded, and a sweet woman's voice whispered, "It is I, Theodore."

Theodore opened the door, but with less alacrity than a young man usually displays in opening to a woman whose voice is sweet and who has come mysteriously to tap at his door towards nightfall. The door opened to admit Rosette in person, more rosy than her name, with as fluttering a heart as a woman ever had on entering the room of a good-looking gentleman.

"Theodore," Rosette said.

Theodore raised a finger, placing it to his lips like a statue of silence, and, pointing to the sleeping child, led her into the next room.

"Theodore," Rosette resumed, appearing to find singular pleasure in repeating the name. "Theodore," she repeated, still holding the hand the young man had offered her as he

conducted her to a seat, "have you come back at last? What have you been doing all this time? Where have you been? Do you know it is six months since I saw you last? Ah! Theodore, that is not right; you owe to a person who loves you, though you do not love her, a little regard and pity."

"What have I done?" he replied. "I hardly know. I have been away and come back, I have slept and watched, sung and wept, I have been hungry and thirsty, I have been too hot and too cold, I have been bored, I have less money and am six months older; I have lived, that is all. And what have you been doing?"

"I have loved you," Rosette answered.

"Is that all you have done?"

"Absolutely, yes. I have employed my time badly, have I not?"

"You might have employed your time better, my poor Rosette; for example, by loving some one who could return your love."

"I am disinterested in love, as in everything else," Rosette retorted. "I do not let out my love on loan; I make a pure gift of it."

"In that you have a very rare virtue, one only born in a chosen soul," Theodore replied. "I have very often wished to be able to love you, at least as you desire but there is between us an insurmountable obstacle which I cannot let you know. Have you had another lover while I have been away?"

"I have one still."

"What sort of a man is he?"

"A poet."

"What sort of a poet is he, and what has he done?"

"I hardly know, a sort of volume no one understands, which I tried to read one evening."

"So you have an unpublished poet for a lover. That should be curious. Is he out at elbow? Does he wear dirty linen?"

"No, he dresses well, washes his hands, and has no ink-spots at the end of his nose. He is a friend of C., whom I met at Madame de Thémine's house; you know her, a big

woman who affects childish ways and gives herself little innocent airs."

"May I be allowed to ask the name of this glorious person?"

"Yes, certainly. He is the Chevalier d'Albert."

"Surely that was the young man who was on the balcony when I dismounted?"

"Quite right."

"Who looked at me so attentively?"

"The same."

"He is a good-looking fellow. So he has not made you forget me?"

"No. Unfortunately, you are not the sort of person one forgets."

"No doubt he loves you very dearly?"

"I can hardly say. There are times when one would think he loved me very dearly; but at heart he does not love me, and he is not far off hating me. He has done just as several other more experienced people: he has acquired a keen appetite for passion, and has been very surprised and disappointed when his love has been assuaged. It is a mistake to think that because people are lovers they adore one another."

"What do you propose doing with this so-called lover who does not love?"

"Just the same as is done with last year's fashions. He is not strong enough to leave me first, and although he does not love me in the real sense of the word, he clings to me from a habit of pleasure, and those ties are the most difficult to break. If I do not help him, he is capable of conscientiously staying with me till the Judgment Day, and even beyond that; for he has the germ of every noble quality, and the flowers of his soul only need expanding in the sunshine of eternal love. Really I am annoyed at not being that sunlight to him. Of all the lovers I have not loved, he is the one I have loved most; and if I were not as good as I am, I should not restore his liberty, and I should still keep him. That I will not do; I have just finished making use of him."

"How much longer will it last?" Theodore asked.

"A fortnight or three weeks, but certainly less than it would have lasted if you had not come. I know that I shall never be your mistress. There is, you say, an unknown reason, to which I should submit if you were allowed to disclose it to me. So although all hope in that direction is forbidden, I cannot decide to be the mistress of another when you are here; it seems to me like profanity, and makes me think that I no longer have the right to love you."

"Keep him for the love of me."

"If it will give you pleasure, I will do so. Ah! if you could have been mine, how different my life would have been! The world has a very false idea of me, and I should have passed out of sight without any one suspecting what I was, except you, Theodore, the only one who has understood me and treated me cruelly. I have never desired any one but you for my lover, and you I have not had. If you had loved me, Theodore, I should have been virtuous and chaste, I should have been worthy of you; instead of that I shall leave (if any one at all recollects me) a reputation for gallantry, as a sort of courtesan, who only differed from the rest because of my rank and wealth. I was born with the most noble inclinations; but nothing depraves a person as much as not being loved. Those despise me who do not know what I have suffered in reaching my present state. Sure of never belonging to the man I preferred above all others, I let myself go with the stream, I have not taken the trouble to defend a body which could not belong to you. No one has had my heart, or ever will. It is yours, although you have broken it; and, different from most women who call themselves honorable, provided they have not gone too far, I have always been faithful in heart and soul to the thought of you. At least I shall have made a few happy; I shall have made white illusions dance around a few pillows. I have innocently deceived more than one noble heart; I have been so miserable at being repulsed by you, that I have always been terrified at the idea of inflicting a similar punishment on some one else. That is the sole motive of many of the adventures which have been attributed to a mere spirit of licentiousness. Licentiousness in me! If you knew, Theo-

dore, how profoundly painful it is to feel that one's life has been a failure, that happiness has passed by on one side, to see that people misunderstand without its being possible to change their opinion, that one's most beautiful qualities are converted into vices and purest essences into black poisons, that one's evil side has been the only one viewed; to have found the door always open for one's vices and always closed for the virtues, and to be unable to bring to perfection, among so many weeds, a single lily or rose! You do not know how painful it is, Theodore!"

"Alas! alas! Rosette, your words are the history of the whole world; the better part of us is the part remaining in us, which we cannot produce. Poets are like that. Their most beautiful verses are the ones they have not written; they carry more poems to their grave than they leave in their library."

"I shall bear my poem with me."

"And so shall I; who have not composed one in my life. Who is so happy or wretched as not to have created one in his heart?"

"Yes! I could have white roses placed upon my tomb. I have had ten lovers, but my heart is virgin, and will remain. Many maidens upon whose graves there is a never-ending shower of jasmine and orange blossoms were veritable Messalinas."

"I know what you are worth, Rosette."

"You alone in the world know what I am, Theodore, for you have seen me beneath the shock of a love which is deep and true, since it is without hope; and he who has not seen a woman in love cannot say what she is; that is what consoles me in my bitterness."

"What do you think of this young man who, in the eyes of the world, is your lover?"

"A lover's thoughts are deeper than the ocean, and it is very hard to say what there is at the heart of a man. The lead might be attached to a hundred thousand fathoms of line without touching bottom. Yet I have touched bottom in a few places, and the sounding apparatus has brought up sometimes mud, sometimes beautiful shells, but more often

mud and bits of coral mixed together. His opinion of me has varied very much; he has begun where others left off, he despised me; young fellows with vivid imaginations are subject to that. There is always an enormous fall in the first step they take, and the passing from their chimera to reality cannot happen without a shock. He despised me and I amused him; now he esteems me and I bore him. In the early days of our liaison he only saw the banal side of me, and I think the certainty of not encountering resistance was of great weight in his determination. He appeared extremely anxious to have a love affair, and I at first thought his was one of those plenitudes of the heart which only seek an outlet; one of those vague loves youth has in the month of May, which are such that, failing women, arms would go round the trunks of trees, and kisses be showered upon the flowers and grass in the meadows. But it was not that; it passed through me to reach another end. I was a path for him and not an end. Beneath the freshness of his twenty years of age, beneath his youthful mustache, he concealed a profound corruption. He was punctured in the heart; he was like a fruit containing nothing but ashes. In his young and vigorous body a soul as old as Saturn was at work. I admit, Theodore, that I was frightened, and vertigo almost overcame me as I leant over the black depths of this existence. Your sorrows and mine are as nothing compared to them. If I had loved him more I should have killed him. Something attracts and imperatively calls him, something which is not of or in this world, and he can have no rest day or night. He is one of the men whose souls have not been dipped completely enough in the waters of Lethe before being attached to the body, for it retains of the sky from whence it comes, memories of eternal beauty which work and torment it, and remembers that it once had wings and has now only feet. If I were God, I would deprive of poetry for two eternities the angel guilty of such negligence. I was no match for this, I appeared not to have understood, and I let him crawl upon his wings and seek a peak from which to launch himself into space. He thinks that I noticed nothing of all that, because I lent myself to all his

caprices without appearing to suspect the object. I wished, being unable to cure him—I hope that it will be one day taken into account before God—to give him at least the happiness of thinking he had been passionately loved. He inspired me with sufficient interest and pity to be easily able to adopt a tone and manners tender enough to deceive him. I played my part like a consummate actress; I was gay and sad, sensible and voluptuous by turns; I feigned easiness and jealousy; I shed false tears, and I summoned to my lips a host of pleasant smiles. I arrayed this manikin of love in the most gorgeous attire; I made him walk in the avenues of my park; I invited all my birds to sing as he passed, and all my flowers to bend their heads in salutation; I made him cross my lake upon the silvery back of my beloved swan; I hid myself within, and I lent him my voice, my mind, my beauty, my youth, and I gave him so seductive an appearance, that the reality was not equal to my sham. When the time comes to shatter the hollow statue, I shall do it, in order to spare him remorse, in such a way that he will believe that all the fault is on my side. I shall be the one to make the hole through which the gas filling the balloon may escape. Is it not a holy deception and honorable fraud? I have in a crystal urn a few tears I gathered just as they were about to fall. That is my casket of jewels and diamonds, and I will present them to the angel who comes to take me into the presence of God.”

“They are more beautiful,” Theodore answered, “than those which gleam at any woman’s neck. A queen’s ornaments are not their equal. For myself, I think that the liquid Magdalene poured upon the feet of Christ was composed of the tears of those she had consoled, and I also think that with such tears is sprinkled the path of St. James, and not, as it has been suggested, with drops of the milk of Juno. Who will do for you what you have done for him?”

“No one, alas, since you cannot.”

“O dear soul! it is impossible! But do not lose hope. You are beautiful, and still very young. You have many avenues of limes and flowering acacias to traverse before reaching that moist road, bordered by bushes and leafless

trees, which leads from the tomb of porphyry, where your beautiful dead years will be interred, to the mossy stone sepulcher where your remains will be hastily bestowed, with the wrinkled and tottering specters of the days of your old age. There is much left of the mountain of life for you to climb, and it will be a long while before you reach the zone of perpetual snow. You are only in the sphere of aromatic plants, of limpid cascades where the iris hangs in multi-colored arches, of beautiful green oaks and sweet-smelling larches. Climb still a little higher, and from that point, in the wider horizon outstretched before you, you will perhaps see the bluish smoke rising from the roof which covers the man who will love you. One must not from the first despair of life; it always opens in this fashion in our destiny with visions of the unexpected. The life of man has often made me think of a pilgrim who ascends the winding stair of a Gothic tower. The long granite serpent twines in the darkness its coils, each scale of which is a step. After a few turns, the gleam of daylight coming from the doorway is blotted out. The shadow of the houses, not yet overtopped, does not allow the airholes to admit the sun; the walls are black and humid; it is more like descending into a dungeon never again to emerge, than ascending a tower which from the earth appears so lofty and slender, and with its carving and tracery, as if it is in holiday dress. The ascent is made hesitatingly, so depressing is its damp darkness. A few more turns of the staircase, and more frequent lights outline the golden trefoils upon the opposite wall. The jagged gables of the houses, the carving of the entablatures, and the strange shapes of the chimneys come into view; a few steps further, and the eye looks down upon the entire city; it is a forest of pinnacles, spires, and towers, which bristle on all sides. The domes and cupolas are rounded like the breasts of a giantess or the skulls of Titans. The blocks of houses and palaces are separated by bright or shady streets. A few steps more and you will be on the platform; then you will see beyond the environs of the city the green of the pastures, the blueness of the hills, and the white veil over the river. Dazzling sunlight overwhelms you, and the

swallows pass and repass close at hand, uttering little joyful cries. The far-off sound of the city comes to you like a friendly murmur or the buzzing of a hive of bees; the breeze bears to you the odors of the neighboring forest and the flowers on the mountain; there is nothing but light, harmony, and perfume. If you had become weary and had remained seated upon a lower step, or had turned back, this view would have been entirely lost to you. Sometimes the tower has but a single opening in the middle or at the top. The tower of our life is built in that way; then it requires more obstinate courage and more desperate perseverance to cling in the darkness to the projections of the stones, to obtain a view of the surrounding country; or else the loopholes have been filled up, or perhaps they have been forgotten altogether, and then it is necessary to climb to the summit; but the higher in the darkness, the more immense does the horizon seem and the greater the surprise and pleasure."

"Oh, Theodore," Rosette replied, "God grant that I may soon reach the place where the window is! Long have I climbed the spiral staircase in the blackest darkness; but I fear the opening has been filled up and I must climb to the summit; and suppose this staircase with its never-ending steps terminates in nothing but a walled-up doorway or an arched stone roof?"

"Don't say that, Rosette; do not even think it. What architect would construct a staircase with no outlet? Why suppose the peaceful designer of the world to be more stupid or shortsighted than an ordinary architect? God makes no mistakes and forgets nothing. It is impossible to believe that it would amuse Him to enclose you in a long stone tube without outlet or opening. Why do you think, poor mice that we are, He will grudge us a miserable minute's happiness. He would feel the ferocity of a tiger or a judge; and if we displease Him so much, He has only to tell a comet to turn a little from its course, and strangle us with a hair of its tail. Courage, Rosette, courage! If you are out of breath, stop a while to recover, and then continue your ascent; you have perhaps only twenty steps to ascend to reach the embrasure from which you will see your happiness."

"Never, oh, never! and if I reach the top of the tower it will only be to throw myself from it."

"Drive away, poor sufferer, these sinister ideas which hover around you like bats and cast the dark shadow of their wings over your beautiful forehead. If you want me to love you, be happy and do not weep."

He drew her to him and kissed her upon the eyes as he said this.

"What a misfortune for me to have met you!" Rosette replied; "and yet, were I to have my time over again I should wish to know you. Your harshness has been sweeter to me than other men's passion; and although you have made me suffer greatly, all my pleasure has come from you; through you I have caught a glimpse of what I might have been. You have been a light in my darkness, and you have lit up many of the dark places in my soul; you have opened up new vistas in my life. I owe to you the fact that I have known love—an unhappy love, it is true; but there is in loving without being loved a profound and melancholy charm, and it is beautiful to call to mind those who forget us. It is a form of happiness to be able to love even when one is alone in that love, and many die without it, so that often the most to be pitied are not those who love."

"They suffer and feel the pain of their wounds, but they at least live; they have something to think of; they have a star around which they gravitate, an axis around which to revolve. They have something to desire; they can say to themselves, 'If I succeed, if I have that I shall be happy.' They suffer frightful agony, but at death they can at least say, 'I die for him.' Death like that is rebirth. The real, the only irreparably unfortunate are those whose mad embrace clasps the whole universe, those who want everything and nothing, and if an angel or fairy were to descend and suddenly say to them, 'Desire something and you shall have it,' they would remain silent and embarrassed."

"If the fairy were to come," Rosette interposed, "I know what I should ask for."

"You know, Rosette, and in that particular you are happier than I am, for I do not know. In me there are many vague desires which mingle together and produce others, only after-

wards to be devoured by them. My desires are like a flock of birds which wheel and hover without an object; your desire is an eagle with its eyes fixed on the sun, and only prevented by a lack of air from rising to it on its outstretched wings. Ah! if I could only know what I desire; if the idea which pursues me only stood out clear and distinct from the mist surrounding it; if the favorable or fatal star appeared in my heaven; if the ray of light I ought to follow shone through the night, whether perfidious will-o'-the-wisp or hospitable beacon; if my pillar of fire preceded me across the desert without manna or springs of water; would that I only knew where I was going, even were the end to be a precipice. To live like this is an occupation like that of those horses which, with blindfold eyes, turn the wheel of a shaft and travel thousands of miles without seeing anything or changing position. I have turned for a long time, and the cage ought soon to be at the top."

"There are many points of resemblance between you and Albert, and when you speak it sometimes seems to me that he is speaking. I am quite sure that when you know him better you will become great friends; you cannot fail to suit one another. He is tormented, just as you are, with these endless impulses; he loves immensely, without knowing what; he would like to soar up into the sky, for the earth appears to him hardly a footstool for one of his feet, and he has more pride than Lucifer before his fall."

"I at first feared," Theodore replied, "that he was one of those poets, and there are so many of them, who have driven poetry from the earth, one of those who string together false pearls, and when they have rhymed a few simple words conscientiously cross their arms and legs, and allow the spheres to complete their revolution."

"He is not one of that sort. His verses are beneath him, and do not contain him. From his efforts quite a false idea of his personality would be gathered; his real poem is himself, and I do not know whether he will ever write another. He has, deep down in his soul, a seraglio of beautiful ideas, which he surrounds with a triple wall, and he is more jealous of them than ever a Sultan was of his odalisques. He only

puts into his verses the ideas he does not care for, or with which he is disheartened, and it is the door from which he expels them, and the world only has what he no longer requires."

"I understand such jealousy and shame. In the same way many persons do not appreciate the love they have had till they have lost it, and their mistresses till they are dead."

"I love those silent people who carry their ideas to their grave and will not leave them to the dirty kisses and the shameless contacts of the crowd. Those lovers please me who do not write their mistresses' name, who do not entrust it to any echo, and who, while sleeping, are pursued by the fear that a dream will make them pronounce it. I am of a similar nature; I have never uttered my thoughts, and none shall know my love. But it is nearly eleven, my dear Theodore, and I am keeping you from a rest of which you must be sadly in need. When I have to leave you I always experience a sinking at my heart, and it seems to me that it will be the last time I shall see you. I put it off as long as possible; but the end must come at last. Come, good-by, for I am afraid Albert will be looking for me. Good-by, dear friend."

Theodore put his arm around her waist, and accompanied her to the door like that; there he stopped, and for a while looked after her. The corridor was pierced here and there by little square windows, now illuminated by the moon, thus producing alternative patches of light and shadow, fantastic in appearance. At each window Rosette's white and pure form gleamed like a silver phantom; then it disappeared, to appear even more brilliant a little further on; at last she entirely disappeared.

Theodore, buried in profound thought, remained motionless for a few moments with his arms folded, then he passed his hand across his brow, and throwing back his hair by a movement of the head, returned to the bedroom, and after kissing the forehead of the page, who was still asleep, he retired to rest.

CHAPTER VII

As soon as it was daylight d'Albert paid Rosette a visit with an eagerness quite unusual as far as he was concerned.

"Well, you have come as early," Rosette said, "as possible; so as a recompense for your gallantry I will give you my hand to kiss."

She drew from beneath the lace-trimmed bed-clothes the prettiest little hand ever seen at the end of a round, plump arm.

D'Albert kissed it with compunction. "And the other one, her little sister, shall I not kiss her too?"

"Oh, yes; nothing is more permissible. I am in my Sunday humor; here." She took her other hand out of bed, and lightly tapped him on the mouth with it. "Am I not the most obliging woman in the world?"

"You are grace personified, and you ought to have white marble temples erected in your honor amid groves of myrtle. Really, I am very much afraid what happened to Psyche will happen to us, and Venus will become jealous of you," d'Albert said, as he joined the two beautiful hands and raised them to his lips.

"How you retail all that in a single breath! It seems to be a phrase you have learned by heart," Rosette said, with a delicious little pout.

"No, you are quite worthy of having phrases turned expressly in your honor, and you are made to cull the first fruits of poesy," d'Albert replied.

"Oh, yes, decidedly; but who has spurred you on to-day? Is it because you are ill that you are so gallant? I am afraid you are going to die. Do you know that when a person suddenly changes his character without apparent reason it is a very bad sign? Now it is proved, in the eyes of all the women who have taken the trouble to love you, that you are usually somewhat sulky, and it is none the less certain that you could not possibly be more charming at this moment, and your amiability is quite inexplicable. But really you are very

pale, poor d'Albert; give me your arm, so that I can feel your pulse"; and she lifted his sleeve and counted the pulsations with comic gravity. "No, you are quite well, and you have not the slightest symptoms of fever. Then I must be furiously pretty this morning! Come, give me my mirror, so that I may see how you are right or wrong."

D'Albert picked up a little mirror from the dressing-table and placed it on the bed.

"Really," Rosette said, "you are not quite wrong. Why do you not write a sonnet to my eyes, Sir Poet? You ought to do so. How unfortunate I am! To have eyes like mine and a poet like yourself, and yet to be without sonnets, just as if I were blind and had a porter for my lover! You do not love me, sir, you have not even composed an acrostic sonnet. And what do you think of my mouth? Still, I have kissed you with this mouth, and may do so again; and, really, it is a favor you scarcely deserve (this does not apply to to-day, for to-day you are worthy of anything); but, to change the subject from myself, this morning your beauty and freshness is unequaled, you are like a brother of Aurora and although it is hardly daylight, you are dressed as if you are going to a ball. Perchance you have designs upon me, or upon my virtue? Would you like to make a conquest of me? But I forget, that is all over and ancient history."

"Rosette, don't joke like that; you know very well that I love you."

"Ah, that depends. I am not so sure; and you?"

"Most perfectly, and so much so that, if you were good enough to close your door against me, I should try to prove it to you, and, I venture to flatter myself, in an unmistakable fashion."

"No; however much I should like to be convinced, my door will remain open; I am too pretty to hide myself; the sun shines for the whole world, and to-day my beauty will, if you please, take the place of the sun."

"In reality, I am not at all pleased; but act as if I were. I am your most humble slave, and I lay my will at your feet."

"That could not be improved; remain of the same mind and this evening leave the key in your room door."

"The Chevalier Theodore de Sérannes," announced the large head of a smiling and fat-faced negro as it appeared in the doorway, "begs to be allowed to pay his respects to you, and prays that you may deign to receive him."

"Show in the Chevalier," said Rosette, as she replaced the bed-clothes right up to her chin.

Theodore first turned towards Rosette's bed, and made her a very deep and graceful bow, which she acknowledged with a friendly nod, and afterwards turned to d'Albert, whom he greeted in a genial and courteous fashion. "Where were you?" Theodore asked. "Perhaps I interrupted an interesting conversation; please resume, and in a few words put me *'au fait.'*"

"Oh no!" Rosette answered, with a malicious smile. "We were talking business."

Theodore sat down at the foot of Rosette's bed, for d'Albert had taken his place near the head by virtue of being the first comer; the conversation for some time flitted from one subject to another in a very clever, gay, and lively fashion, and for that reason, it shall not be reproduced; besides, I am afraid it would lose too much through transcription. The air, tone, and fire of the words and gestures, the thousand and one fashions of pronouncing a word, and all their cleverness, like the sparkle of champagne which fizzes and evaporates at once, are things it is impossible to fix and reproduce. It is a hiatus we leave the reader to fill, and he will assuredly acquit himself better than we should; so let the reader here imagine five or six pages full of the finest, most capricious, most curiously fantastic, most elegant and sparkling conversation.

We know very well that we are here making use of an artifice which, in some respects, recalls that of Timanthes, who, despairing of being able to reproduce the face of Agamemnon, threw a drapery over the head; we prefer to be timid rather than imprudent.

It would not perhaps be out of place to inquire into the motives which caused d'Albert's early rising, and find out what motive had driven him to visit Rosette as early as if he had still loved her. In appearance, it was a little display of unconfessed jealousy. Certainly he was not very fond of

Rosette, and he would have parted from her, but at least he desired the rupture to come from him, and not from her, for in the latter case a man's pride is always deeply wounded, however dead his love may be. Theodore was such a ladies' man that it was difficult to see him appear in the course of a liaison without fearing that (and it had already happened many times) all eyes would turn in his direction, and hearts would follow the eyes; and, strange to say, although he had appropriated many women, no lover had felt that long-standing resentment against him which is usually the experience of the supplanter. He had, in all his moods, such an invincible charm, such a natural grace, something so gentle and proud that even men were sensible to its influence. D'Albert, who had visited Rosette with the desire to speak very sharply to Theodore if he met him, was very surprised at not experiencing in his presence any feeling of anger, and at replying with so much facility to the advances made by him. After half an hour you would have said they were two old school chums, and yet d'Albert was inwardly convinced that if Rosette were ever to love this would be the man, and that he would have good grounds for jealousy in the future at least, though for the present he had as yet no suspicion; what would he have thought if he had seen the beauty in her white wrapper glide like a moth upon a moonbeam into the handsome young man's room, and not emerge till three or four hours later, and then with mysterious precautions? He would perhaps have considered himself more unhappy that he really was, for it does not often happen that a pretty and amorous woman leaves a gentleman's room just as pretty as she entered it.

Rosette listened to Theodore most attentively, as a woman sometimes listens to her lover; but his conversation was so amusing and varied that her attention was quite natural, and quite easily comprehensible. So d'Albert did not take umbrage. Theodore's tone to Rosette was polite and friendly, but nothing more.

"What shall we do to-day, Theodore?" Rosette said; "shall we go out in a boat?—will that suit you? Or shall we go hunting?"

"Let us go out hunting, that is less melancholy than gliding upon the water side by side with a bored swan, and parting the water-lily leaves right and left; don't you think so, d'Albert?"

"I would, perhaps, just as soon drift with the stream in a boat as gallop madly in pursuit of a poor animal; but where you go I will follow; it is now only a question of allowing Madame Rosette to get up and don a suitable costume." Rosette made a sign of assent, and rang the bell for her maid to come and dress her. The two young fellows went off arm in arm, and it was not easy to guess, seeing them such good friends, that one was the lover and the other the sweetheart of the same person.

Every one was soon ready. D'Albert and Theodore were already mounted in the courtyard, when Rosette, in her riding-habit, appeared on the steps. She had a lively and resolute manner which suited her admirably. She jumped into the saddle with her usual nimbleness and gave her horse a cut with her riding whip which sent him off like an arrow. D'Albert with a touch of the spur soon joined her, while Theodore allowed them to get a short distance ahead of him, being sure of overtaking them when he pleased. He seemed to expect something, and often turned round in the direction of the château.

"Theodore! Theodore! Come along! Are you riding a wooden horse?" Rosette called out to him.

Theodore put his horse into a gallop, and decreased the distance which separated him from Rosette, without quite overtaking her.

He again looked towards the château, which was now almost out of sight; a little cloud of dust, in which something not yet visible was moving very quickly, appeared at the end of the road. In a few minutes the cloud of dust was by Theodore's side, and out of it emerged the fresh and rosy face of the mysterious page.

"Theodore, come along!" Rosette called out a second time. "Spur your tortoise and rejoin us."

Theodore gave the horse his head, and in a few seconds he had passed d'Albert and Rosette.

"He who loves me follows me," said Theodore, as he jumped a gate four feet high. "Ah well! Sir Poet," he said, when he had landed on the other side, "do you not jump? Yet your steed is winged, so it is said."

"Well, I prefer to go round; I have only one head to break, after all; if I had several I would try," d'Albert replied, with a smile.

"Nobody loves me as nobody follows me," Theodore said, dropping more than usual the curved corners of his mouth. The little page fixed his large blue eyes on him with a look of reproach and dug his heels into his horse's sides.

The horse gave a tremendous leap.

"Yes, some one does," he said from the other side of the gate.

Rosette cast a strange glance at the child and blushed up to her eyes; then, giving her mare a sharp cut, she jumped over the wooden barrier which crossed the ride.

"Do you think, Theodore, that I don't love you as well?"

The child cast a sidelong glance at her from under his eyelashes and drew near Theodore.

D'Albert was already half-way along the ride and saw nothing of this; for from time immemorial fathers, husbands, and lovers have had the privilege of being blind.

"Isnabel," Theodore said, "you are a fool, and you, Rosette, as well! Isnabel, you did not take room enough to jump, and you, Rosette, only just missed catching your dress in the post. You might have killed yourself."

"What does it matter?" Rosette answered in a voice so sad and melancholy that Isnabel forgave her for jumping the barrier.

They proceeded some distance further, and reached the clearing where the meet was to take place. Six rides, cut through the depths of the forest, met at a signpost a little stone tower. The trees were so tall that they seemed to wish to touch the fleecy clouds which a moderate breeze was speeding over their tops, while the long grass and thick bushes provided cover for the game, and sport promised to be good. It was a real old-world forest, with oaks of more than a hundred years old, such as we never see in these days when trees

are no longer planted and people have not the patience to wait for those already planted to grow; it was an hereditary forest, planted by the great-grandfathers for the fathers, by the fathers for the grandsons, with avenues of prodigious width, an obelisk, surmounted by a head, a rockwork fountain, the usual lake, and the powdered gamekeepers in yellow leather breeches and sky-blue coats. A multitude of dogs' tails, like bill-hooks, waved hither and thither in a cloud of dust. The signal was given, the straining dogs were uncoupled, and the sport commenced. We shall not describe with exactness the stag's course through the forest; we do not even know if it was a full-grown stag or not, and our inquiries have not satisfied us on that point, painful though it is to have to admit it. Yet we think that in a forest so ancient, shady, and princely there ought only to be full-grown stags, and we do not see why the one after which galloped upon different-colored horses the four principal characters of this story should not be one too.

The stag traveled like a champion, and the fifty dogs he had at his heels were no slight spur to his natural speed. The run was so sharp that the dogs only gave tongue occasionally.

Theodore, being the best mounted and the most accomplished horseman, with wonderful dash kept at the heels of the pack. D'Albert was close behind. Rosette and the little page Isnabel followed, separated from the others by an ever-increasing gap.

The gap was soon so large that it was quite hopeless for them to recover the lost ground.

"Suppose we stop for a little while to give the horses a breather. The chase is going in the direction of the lake, and I know a crosspath by which we can get there as soon as the others."

Isnabel on her little mountain pony drew rein, and her mount dropped his head and began to scatter the sand with his hoofs.

The pony formed the most perfect contrast possible to Rosette's mare; he was black as night, while the mare was of the whiteness of satin. He was shaggy and unkempt, while the mare had her mane plaited with blue ribbon and her tail

combed and tied up. One was like a unicorn, the other a poodle.

The same contrast was noticeable between the riders as between their steeds. Rosette's hair was as black as Isnabel's was fair; her eyelashes were very clearly and distinctly marked; the page's were scarcely discernible from the skin, and were very much like the bloom upon the peach. The color of one was strong and solid like the light at midday, while the tints of the other contained the transparencies and shades of early dawn.

"Shall we now try and fall in with the hunt?" Isnabel asked Rosette; "the horses have got their wind."

"Come along then!" the pretty Amazon replied, as she set off at a gallop along the narrow crosspath leading to the lake; the two horses, side by side, took up almost the entire width of the ride.

On Isnabel's side a gnarled and knotted tree extended a thick branch like an arm and seemed to be shaking its fist at the riders. The child did not see it. "Take care," Rosette cried; "stoop low in your saddle or you will be off."

The warning was too late; the bough struck Isnabel in the middle of the body. The violence of the contact caused him to lose his stirrups, and as his pony continued its gallop and the branch was too strong to break, he was lifted out of the saddle and fell heavily to the ground.

The child lost consciousness. Rosette, greatly frightened, jumped from her horse and hastened to the page, who gave no sign of life.

His cap had fallen off and his beautiful fair hair was spread upon the sand. His little open hands were like wax, so pale were they. Rosette knelt by his side and tried to restore him. She had neither flask nor smelling salts with her, and was greatly distressed. At last she saw a deep rut in which the rain water had collected, she dipped her fingers in it, to the great terror of a little frog, the naiad of this pool, and shook a few drops upon the young page's temples. He did not seem to feel it, and the drops of water trickled down his white cheeks like the tears of a sylph upon a lily leaf. Rosette, thinking that his clothes were too tight, undid his belt

and unbuttoned his jersey so that his chest might have freer play. Rosette then saw something which to a man would have been one of the most agreeable surprises in the world, but which did not seem to afford her much pleasure, for her brows contracted and her upper lip trembled slightly. She saw a very white throat, still unformed, but giving the most admirable promise and already very beautiful, and a round, polished, ivory bosom, delightful to see, more delightful to kiss.

"A woman," she said. "A woman! Ah, Theodore!"

Isnabel, for we will call him by that name though it was not his, began to breathe a little and languidly raised his long eyelashes; he was not hurt in any way, simply stunned. He soon recovered and with Rosette's help remounted his pony, which had stopped as soon as it lost its rider.

They were quite close to the lake, where they fell in with the rest of the field. Rosette told Theodore in a few words what had happened. The latter changed color several times during Rosette's story and all the rest of the day rode by the side of Isnabel.

They got back to the château early. The day begun so joyfully had ended in a sorrowful fashion.

Rosette was dreamy, and d'Albert seemed deep in reflection. The reader will soon know the reason.

CHAPTER VIII

No, my dear Silvo, I have not forgotten you; I am not one of those persons who go through life without ever casting a glance behind; my past follows me, and encroaches upon the present, and almost upon the future. Your friendship is one of the sunny spots which stand out most clearly from the blue horizon of my latter years; in fact, I often turn back to contemplate it with a sentiment of ineffable melancholy.

Oh! what a fine time it was! How angelically pure we

were! Our feet hardly touched the earth; we seemed to have wings on our shoulders, our desires carried us away, and the spring breeze made the blond halo of youth quiver around our brows.

Do you remember that little island planted with poplars at the spot where the river forked? To reach it we had to cross a long, narrow plank which bent very much in the middle; a real goats' bridge, in fact, hardly good enough for them; it was delightful. Short, close turf, a yellow path like a girdle to the island's green dress, enclosing it at the waist, and an ever-moving shade of aspens and poplars, were not the least attractive parts of this paradise. There were great pieces of linen which the women spread out to whiten in the dew; they looked like squares of snow; and the little girl, dark and sun-burnt, whose big wild eyes shone so brilliantly beneath the locks of her hair, who ran after the goats, threatening them, and waving her osier switch, when they made an attempt to walk upon the linen of which she had charge; do you recollect her? and the saffron-colored butterflies with their unsteady flight, and the kingfisher we so often tried to catch, with its nest in the alder thicket. How limpid and gleaming was the water, showing the golden gravel at the bottom of the stream; what pleasure we found in sitting on the bank and dangling our toes in the stream! The water lilies, with their golden flowers gracefully unfolded, looked like green tresses floating upon the agate back of some nymph in her bath. The sky gazed upon itself in this mirror with azure smiles and the most ravishing pearl-grey transparencies, and at all hours of the day there were turquoises, spangles, whiteness, and waves of inexhaustible variety. How I loved those squadrons of little ducks with emerald necks, which swam ceaselessly from one bank to the other and made a few ripples upon that liquid mirror!

How well fitted we were to be the figures in such a landscape! How we suited that gentle, restful nature and how easily we harmonized with it! Spring was without, youth within, the sun upon the grass, a smile upon the lips, a snow of blossoms upon all the bushes, white illusions spreading in our souls, a blush of shame upon our cheeks and upon the

dog-rose, poetry singing in our hearts, hidden birds whistling in the trees, and there was light, cooing, perfume, a thousand confused sounds, a beating heart, the water moving a pebble, a blade of grass of a half-formed thought, a drop of water trickling along a flower, a tear trembling upon an eyelid, a sigh of love, and the rustle of the leaves. What evenings we spent there strolling so near the edge that we often walked with one foot in the water and the other on the bank.

Alas! that did not last long, in my case at least, for when you acquired man's knowledge you kept your childish candor. The germ of corruption in me developed very quickly, and the gangrene ate up all that was pure and holy. The only good thing I had left was my friendship for you.

I am used to hiding nothing from you, neither actions nor thoughts. I have laid bare to you the most secret fibers of my heart; however strange, ridiculous, or eccentric are the movements of my soul, I must describe them to you; but really my experiences of late are so strange that I hardly dare acknowledge them to myself. I told you somewhere that I was afraid that, from seeking the beautiful and making efforts to obtain it, I should in the end reach the impossible or monstrous. I have almost got to that stage. When shall I emerge from all these currents which drift me hither and thither? When will the bridge of my vessel cease to tremble beneath my feet and to be swept away by the waves of all these storms? Where shall I find a harbor in which to drop anchor and an immovable rock out of the waves, where I can dry myself and wring the foam from my hair?

You know how ardently I have sought for physical beauty, what importance I attach to the external form, and what love I have for the visible world; it must be that I am too blasé or corrupt to believe in moral beauty and pursue it with some result. I have completely lost the knowledge of good and evil, and through depravity have almost returned to the ignorance of the savage and the child. Really nothing seems to me praiseworthy or blameable, and the strangest actions surprise me but little. My conscience is deaf and dumb. Adultery seems to me the most innocent thing in the world; it is probable I should betray my friends without the least

remorse, and I should have no scruple about pushing with my foot over a precipice people who bored me, if I were walking with them at its edge. I should watch in cold blood the most atrocious scenes, and there is in the suffering and misfortune of humanity something which does not displease me. I should feel at the sight of some terrible calamity overtaking the world the same bitter pleasure a man experiences when he takes revenge for a former insult.

O world, what have you done for me to hate you like this? What has turned me against you? What did I expect of you to retain so much hatred at being deceived? What lofty hope have you brought to naught? What eagle's wings have you clipped? What doors ought you to have opened which remained closed, and which of the two of us has failed the other?

Nothing touches me, nothing moves me; I no longer feel on hearing the story of heroic actions those sublime tremors which formerly used to traverse me from head to foot. All that sort of thing seems to me somewhat foolish. No accent is penetrating enough to bite the distended fibers of my heart and make them vibrate: I watch tears flowing from the eyes of my fellows with the same feeling that I watch the rainfall, unless the water of which they are composed is beautiful, or the light reflects in them in a picturesque way, or they flow down a beautiful cheek. They are but animals for whom I feel a slight remnant of pity. I would allow a peasant or servant to be unmercifully beaten, though I would not stand by and see a horse or dog suffer similar treatment, and yet I am not evil. I have done no harm to any one in the world, nor shall I probably ever do so. I abhor the whole world in mass, and from its numbers I only consider one or two worthy of special hatred. The hatred of a person causes just as great a feeling of anxiety as love; it is the distinction, the isolation of one out of the crowd; it produces a state of violence on his account; it means the thought of him by day, dreams by night. What more does a person do for the one he loves? Would the trouble and precautions taken to destroy an enemy be devoted to a mistress's pleasure? I doubt it, for to really hate some one, it is necessary to love another. A great hate serves

as a counterpoise to a great love; and whom should I hate, I who love nothing?

My hatred is like my love, a confused and general sentiment which seeks to cling to something and cannot. I have in me a treasure of hate and of love which I do not know how to use and which weighs upon me horribly. If I do not find a means of bestowing one or the other or both, I shall burst, like a bag too full of money. Oh! if I could only hate some one, if one of the stupid fellows with whom I live could only insult me, so as to make my blood boil in my veins, and arouse me from my mournful somnolence. If the last heartbeat of an enemy writhing beneath my feet could make a delightful tremor run through me, and if the smell of his blood could become more pleasant to my nostrils than the scent of flowers, oh how willingly I would renounce love, and how happy I should consider myself!

I love nothing, I have said. Alas! I am now afraid of loving some one. It would be a thousand times better to hate than to love like that! I have met the type of beauty I have dreamed about for so long. I have discovered the body of my phantom; I have seen and we have spoken; I have shaken hands with my chimera. I knew very well that I could not be mistaken and that my presentiments never lied. Yes, Silvio, I am by the side of my life's dream; my room is here, hers is there. I can see from here the curtain of her window shake and the light of her lamp. Her shadow has just passed across the curtain: in an hour we shall sup together.

The beautiful Turkish eyelids, the limpid and profound glance, the warm color of pale amber, the long and shining black hair, the fine, haughty nose, the small slender hands and feet, the sinuous delicacy, and the oval purity which give so much distinction and such aristocratic appearance to a head, in fact, the whole of my desire is complete; all that I should have been fortunate to find scattered among five or six persons is combined in a single one.

The thing I adore most in the world is a beautiful hand. If you only saw its perfection, its whiteness, the softness of the skin and its penetrating moisture; the far-famed hands of Anne of Austria were rough compared with them. What art

and grace there is in the slightest movement of such a hand! The thought of the hand alone makes me quite mad, and causes me to tremble and my lips to burn. I close my eyes to shut out the sight of it; but the ends of its delicate fingers seize my lashes and lift up my eyelids, causing a thousand visions of ivory and snow to pass through my mind.

Ah! without a doubt Satan's claw is covered by such a skin; some jesting demon is playing with me; it is sorcery. The thing is too monstrously impossible.

As for the hand, I am going to travel to Italy to see the works of the great masters, to study, compare, draw, and in fact become a painter in order to be able to reproduce it as it is, as I see it, as I realize it; that will perhaps be a way of getting rid of this sort of obsession.

I desired beauty; I did not know what I asked. It was like a wish to look at the sun without eyes, or to touch a flame. I suffer horribly. To be unable to assimilate such perfection, to be unable to pass into it and absorb it into oneself, to have no way of reproducing it! When I see something beautiful, I should like to touch it with my entire self, everywhere at the same time. I would like to sing its praises, to paint it, to be loved by it as I love it; I should like something which cannot and will never be.

Your letter has pained me very much, forgive me for saying so. All the calm, pure happiness you enjoy, the walks in the reddening woods, the long talks, so tender and confidential, which end in a chaste kiss upon the forehead; the serene detached life; the days so quickly passed that the night seems to advance towards one, make the internal agitation in which I live seem even more tempestuous. So you are to be married in two months; all obstacles are swept away; you are sure now of belonging to one another for ever. Your present happiness increases your future felicity. You are happy and you are sure of soon being happier. What a fortunate lot is yours! Your love is beautiful, but it is not the dead and palpable beauty in her you adore, the material beauty; it is the invisible and eternal beauty, the beauty which never grows old, the beauty of the soul. She is full of grace and candor; she loves you in the way such souls know how to love. Oh,

Silvio! how rare are the hearts contented with love pure and simple, which neither desire of hermitage in the forest nor a garden on an island of Lake Maggiore.

If I had courage to tear myself away from this spot, I would spend a month with you; perhaps I should become purified in the air you breathe, perhaps the shade of your avenues would restore a little freshness to my burning brow; but it is a paradise in which I must not set foot. Hardly am I permitted to look from a distance over the wall at the two beautiful angels walking there hand in hand, gazing into each other's eyes. The demon can only enter into Eden in the form of a serpent, and my dear Adam, for all the joy of heaven I would not like to be the serpent of your Eve.

What frightful havoc is it which has been wrought in my soul of late? Who has turned my blood and changed it into poison? I wished to love. I was like a madman calling and mocking love; I writhed with rage under the feeling of my own impotence; I fired my blood, I dragged my body to the quagmires of pleasure. I have ferociously pressed against my empty heart a young and beautiful woman who loved me; I have run after passion and it eluded me. I have prostituted myself, and I have been like a virgin who went into a brothel hoping to find a lover among those driven there by debauchery, instead of waiting patiently in discreet silence and shadow till the angel reserved by God for me appeared in a radiant glow, a flower from heaven in his hand. All the years I have lost in childish agitation, in running hither and thither, in wishing to force nature and time, I ought to have passed in solitude and meditation, in trying to render myself worthy of being loved; that would have been a wise course; but I had scales upon my eyes and I walked straight to the precipice. I have already one foot suspended over the abyss, and I think I shall soon lift the other. Resistance is vain, and I feel that I must fall to the bottom of this new abyss which has just opened in front of me.

When I am about to enter the drawing room we are in the habit of using, I feel all the symptoms of love described by the poets; my heart beats with such violence that it can almost be seen through my clothes, and I am obliged to com-

press it with my two hands to prevent its escape. If I see my ideal at the end of an avenue in the park, distance is at once effaced, and I do not know where the road leads; the devil must convey one of us, or I must have wings. Nothing can distract me: when I read the image is interposed between the book and my eyes; I ride on horseback, but all the while I seem to feel the long hair mingling with mine and the warm breath fanning my cheek. The image obsesses me and follows me every where, and I never see it more clearly than when it is not present.

You have pitied me for not loving, now do so for loving, and especially for loving the person I do love. What a misfortune it is, what a blow from an ax to fall upon my already shattered life! What mad, culpable, and odious passion has taken possession of me! The blush of shame on its account will never leave my face. It is the most deplorable of all my aberrations. I cannot imagine nor understand anything concerning it; everything in me is confused and reversed. I no longer know who I am or who the others are; I doubt whether I am woman or man. I have a horror of myself, I experience strange and inexplicable movements, and there are moments when it seems that my reason is departing and when the consciousness of my existence quite abandons me. For a long while I could not believe it; I observed myself attentively. I tried to unravel the confused skein which is entangled in my soul. At last through all the veils enveloping it I discovered the frightful truth. Silvio, I am in love. Oh, no; I shall never be able to tell you. I am in love with a man!

CHAPTER IX

I LOVE a man, Silvio. I have long sought to delude myself; I have given a different name to the sentiment I feel; I have dressed it in the habit of pure and disinterested friendship; I thought it was only the admiration I feel for handsome

persons and beautiful things; I wandered for several days in the smiling and treacherous pathways which surround the birthplace of a passion; but I now recognize the steep and terrible road on which I have embarked. There is no concealment: I have thoroughly examined myself, I have coldly weighed all the circumstances; I have gone into every detail; I have ransacked my soul in every direction with the certainty which the habit of self study gives. I blush to think and write about it! It is quite certain that I love this young man not with friendship, but with love; yes, with love.

You whom I have loved so much, Silvio, my good, my only comrade, you have never given me any such impression, and yet if under heaven there was any close friendship, if ever two souls, although different, perfectly understood one another, it was our friendship and our two souls. What fleeting hours we passed together! What endless talks we had, and yet they seemed to end too soon. We had in our hearts for each other that window which Momus would have liked to open in man's flank. How proud I was to be your friend, I who am younger than you, yet so mad while you are so reasonable!

My feeling for this young man is really incredible; never has a woman created such an impression on me. The sound of his clear and silvery voice gets upon my nerves and agitates me in a strange fashion; my soul hangs upon his lips, like a bee on a flower, to drink in the honey of his words. I cannot brush against him in passing without trembling from head to foot, and in the evening when we separate, as he holds out his soft and satiny hand, all my life wells towards the spot he has touched, and an hour afterwards I can still feel the pressure of his fingers.

This morning I watched him for a long time without his seeing me. I was concealed behind my curtain. He was at his window, which was precisely opposite mine. This part of the château was built at the end of the reign of Henry IV; it is half brick, half rubble, according to the fashion of the period; the window is long and narrow with a stone lintel and balcony. Theodore, for without a doubt you have guessed it is he, was leaning sadly upon the balcony and appeared to

be in a deep reverie. Drapery of red damask with large flowers half raised fell in large folds behind him and served as a background. How good-looking he was, and how his dark, pale head stood out from its background. Two big locks of black, gleaming hair, like bunches of grapes, hung gracefully upon his cheeks and enclosed in charming fashion the fine, regular oval of his beautiful face. His round, plump neck was entirely bare, and he had a sort of large-sleeved dressing gown which was rather like a woman's dress. He held in his hand a yellow tulip which he pitilessly dismembered in his reverie and cast the fragments to the winds.

The sun shone upon him as he stood with the breeze gently moving his long hair, while with his bare, marble-like neck, with his dressing gown fastened at the waist, with his slender hands emerging from the sleeves like a flower's pistils from the midst of the petals, he did not appear to be the best looking of men, but a most beautiful woman, and I said to myself in my heart, "Theodore is a woman!" Then I suddenly recollected a bit of foolishness I wrote to you a long while ago—you remember—concerning my ideal and the way in which I should most certainly meet her: the beautiful lady in the Louis XIII park, the red and white château, the terrace, the avenues of ancient chestnuts, and the conversation at the window; I gave you previously all those details. This is indeed the precise realization of my dream. It was the same style of architecture, the same effect of light and shade, the sort of beauty, the color and character I had desired; there was nothing lacking except the fact that the lady was a man: but I must admit I had then entirely forgotten that circumstance.

Theodore must be a woman in disguise; otherwise the thing is impossible. This beauty, excessive even for a woman, is not the beauty of a man, even an Antinous the friend of Hadrian, or an Alexis the companion of Virgil. Theodore is a woman, and I am very foolish to be so tormented in my mind. Therefore everything is explained quite naturally, and I am not the monster I believed myself to be.

Would God put silken lashes so long and dark around a man's eyes? Would He tint with such bright and tender carmine our ugly and hairy mouths? Our bones are not

worthy of a covering of such white and delicate flesh; our skulls are not made to be covered with waves of such beautiful hair.

O beauty! we are only created to love and adore you on our bended knees if we find you, or else to seek you forever throughout the world if that happiness is not vouchsafed to us; but to possess you, to be beautiful, that is only possible to angels and women. Lovers, poets, painters, and sculptors, we all seek to raise an altar to you—the lover in his mistress, the poet in his song, the painter in his canvas, the sculptor in his marble but our eternal despair is our inability to make palpable the beauty we perceive, and the fact that we are enveloped in a body which does not realize our ideal.

I have before now seen a young man who has stolen the form which ought to have been mine. The wretch was just as I should have liked to be. He had the beauty of my ugliness, and by his side I was like a rough copy of him. He was of my height, but stronger and more slender than I; his appearance resembled mine, but with an elegance and nobility I lacked. His eyes were of the same color as mine, but they had a look and brilliancy mine will never possess. His nose had been cast in the same mold as mine, only his seemed to have been finished by the chisel of a skillful sculptor; the nostrils were more open and passionate. There was something heroic in him which is entirely lacking in me; it was just as if I had tried to make a perfected model of myself. I seemed to be the rough copy of a thought of which he was the fair copy. When I saw him walk, stop, greet the ladies, and sit down with a perfect grace, the result of the beauty of his proportions, I was filled with sadness and frightful jealousy, such as must be felt by the clay cast which dries and cracks in a dark corner of the studio, while the noble marble statue, which without it would not exist, stands proudly upon its carved pedestal and attracts the attention and eulogy of visitors. Now this fellow was merely myself a little more successfully cast in less wayward bronze which had run with more exactness into all the crevices of the mold. I considered him very bold to strut about with my form and put on airs as if he were an original type: after all, he was only my

copy, for I was born before him, and without me Nature would not have conceived the idea of making him as he was. When the women praised his good looks and the agreeableness of his person, I had the greatest desire to get up and say, "How foolish you are; praise me at once, for this gentleman is myself, and it is a useless dodge to give him what really belongs to me." This young man besides was stupid, still he was more successful on that account. But sometimes I envied his stupidity more than his good looks. Now although Theodore is very handsome, I have no desire for his beauty; I prefer it to belong to him rather than to me.

Those strange loves, of which the elegies of the ancient poets are full, which surprise us so much, and which we cannot conceive, are therefore likely and possible. In our translations we substitute the names of women for those already there. Juventius ends as Juventia, while Alexis becomes Ianthé. Handsome boys become good-looking girls, and in this way we reconstruct the monstrous seraglio of Catullus, Tibullus, Martial, and Virgil. It is a bold task, which shows how little we understand the ancient genius.

I am a man of Homeric times; the world in which I live is not mine, and I do not understand the society which surrounds me. I am as pagan as Alcibiades and Phidias. I find earth as beautiful as heaven, and I consider that correctness of form is virtue. Spirituality is not my share; I prefer a statue to a phantom, and the midday sunlight to the dawn. Three things please me: gold, marble, and purple—brilliance, solidity, and color. My dreams are made of them, and all the palaces I build in my mind are constructed of these materials. Sometimes I have other dreams; visions of long cavalades of white horses, without bridles and trappings, ridden by handsome youths quite naked, defiling upon a blue ground, or of bands of young girls crowned with fillets, wearing tunics with straight folds and carrying ivory fans who seem to circle around an immense vase. Never is there any fog or vapor in them, never anything uncertain or floating. My heaven has no clouds, or if so they are solid hewn clouds made of the fragments of marble fallen from the statue of Jupiter. Mountains with high peaks indent its edges, and the sun,

resting upon one of the loftiest heights, opens wide a yellow eye with its gilded lion-like pupils. The grasshopper creaks, the ears of corn rustle; the shade, overwhelmed and unable to withstand the heat, contracts and is concentrated at the foot of the trees; everything is shining, gleaming, and sunlit. The smallest detail assumes distinctness and is boldly accentuated; each object puts on a robust form. There is no place in it for the visionary softness of Christian art. That world is mine. The streams of my landscapes fall in the waves of a carved urn; between the great reeds can be seen gleaming the round silvery thigh of some naiad with glaucous hair. In the dark oak forest is to be found Diana wearing her interlaced buskins, with her case of arrows upon her back and her loosened sling. She is followed by her pack of hounds and her nymphs with harmonious names. My pictures are painted in four colors, like those of the primitive painters, and often they are only colored bas-reliefs, for I love to touch with my finger what I see, and pursue the curving contours to their most secret folds. I have looked upon love in the light of the ancients and as a bit of more or less perfect sculpture. How is the arm? Well enough. The arms do not lack delicacy. What do you think of this foot? I think that the ankle has no nobility about it, and the heel is common. But the throat is well placed and of good shape, the line of the figure is waving enough, the shoulders are fat and of beautiful character. This woman would be a passable model and it would be possible to sketch several parts from her. Let us love her.

I have always been like that. I have for women a sculptor's eye rather than a lover's. I have all my life been critical of the shape of the flagon rather than of the quality of its contents. If I were to have the box of Pandora in my hands I think I should not open it.

I look upon woman according to the ancient manner as a beautiful slave destined for our pleasures. Christianity has not rehabilitated her in my eyes. She is to me always something unlike and inferior to myself, something to be adored and enjoyed, a plaything more intelligent than if it were of ivory or gold, with the power of getting up without assistance if dropped upon the ground. I have been told, on that

account, that I thought ill of women; on the contrary, I consider that I think very well of them.

I really do not know why women have such a desire to be considered men. I can imagine a person desiring to be a serpent, lion, or an elephant; but it passes my comprehension how any one can desire to be a man. If I had been at the Council of Trent when the important matter of whether a woman was a man was discussed I should certainly have inclined towards the negative view.

I have in my life written a few amorous verses, or at least stanzas which pretended to be such. I have just reread some of them. The sentiment of modern love is entirely absent from them. If they were written in Latin distiches instead of French rhyme they might be mistaken for the work of a bad poet of the days of Augustus. I am surprised that the women to whom they were written, instead of being charmed with them, were not seriously angered. It is quite true that women no more understand poetry than do the flowers or vegetables, and is quite natural and explicable, seeing that they themselves are poetry, or at least its best instruments; the flute neither hears nor understands the air played upon it.

In these verses nothing but the gold or ebony of the hair, the miraculous fineness of the skin, the roundness of the arms, the little feet, and the delicate shape of the hand is mentioned, and they all end in a humble supplication to the divinity to grant as quickly as possible the enjoyment of all these beautiful things. In the passages of triumph there are only garlands hung at the threshold, a rain of flowers, burning perfumes, kisses, white and charming nights, quarrels with the dawn, with injunctions to the dawn to return to its hiding place behind the saffron curtains of old Pithonus; it is an explosion without heat, a sonority without vibration. The lines are exact and polished, but through all their refinement and veils of expression can be heard the sharp, hard voice of the master which he tries to soften when speaking to his slave. It is not, as in the erotic poetry composed since the Christian era, a soul asking another soul to love because it loves; it is not an azure and smiling lake inviting a stream to vanish into its bosom, so that together they may reflect the

stars in the sky; it is not a couple of doves opening their wings at the same time to fly to the same nest.

"Cinthia, you are beautiful; hasten. Who knows if you will live till to-morrow? Your locks are darker than the glossy skin of an Ethiopian virgin. Hasten; a few years hence silver threads will appear in those thick tresses. These roses smell sweetly to-day; to-morrow they will have the odor of death and will only be the corpses of flowers. Let us breathe your roses, for they are so like your cheeks; let us kiss your cheeks, for they are so like your roses. When you are old, Cinthia, no one will desire you, not even the lictor's servants when you pay them, and you will run after me whom you now repulse. Wait till Saturn has ruled with his nail that pure and shining brow, and you will see how your threshold, now so besieged and sprinkled with tears and flowers, will be shunned, cursed, and overgrown with grass and briars. Hasten, Cinthia; the tiniest wrinkle may serve as the grave of the greatest passion."

It is in this brutal and imperious formula that the ancient elegy is summed up; it always returns to that; it is its greatest and strongest reason, and the Achilles of its arguments. After that there is little more to be said, and when a robe and a necklace of well-matched pearls have been promised, a man is at his wits' end. That, too, is what I find most conclusive in similar circumstances. I do not, however, always strictly adhere to this program, and I embroider my meager canvas here and there with a few threads of different colored silks. But these bits are short or else knotted twenty times and badly fastened. I talk elegantly enough about love because I have read many beautiful essays on the subject. That does not require the actor's talent. With many women the appearance suffices. The habit of writing and imagining guarantees that I do not stop short in these matters, and any mind with a little application will easily obtain the same result; but I do not feel a word of what I say, and I repeat in low tones like the ancient poet, "Cinthia, hasten."

I have often been charged with being crafty and deceitful. No one in the world would like as well to speak freely and empty his heart. But as I have not one idea or sentiment

like those of the people who surround me, as at the first true word I let fall there would be an hurrah and a general outcry, I have preferred silence, or if I speak, to only repeat the commonplaces I have heard. I should soon be in the ladies' bad graces were I to tell them what I have just written to you. I do not think they would appreciate my way of looking at and viewing love. As to the men, the best I can say for them is that they ought to walk on all fours, and I can hardly tell them that; I have no desire to cause a quarrel with every word I utter. It does not matter what I think or what I do not think; whether I am sad when I seem to be gay, or joyful when I seem to be melancholy. I am not blamed because I do not go about naked. Can I not dress my face as I do my body? Why should a mask seem more reprehensible than clothes, and a lie than a corset?

Alas! the earth turns round the sun roasted on one side and frozen on the other. A battle is fought in which 600,000 men hack one another to pieces. Still the weather is beautiful and the flowers display unparalleled coquetry, for they boldly open their luxuriant blossoms even under the horses' hoofs. To-day a fabulous number of good actions have been performed; yet it pours with rain, snows and thunders, with lightning and hail; it seems as if the end of the world is approaching. The benefactors of humanity have mud up to their waists, and are splashed like dogs unless they have a carriage. Creation mocks pitilessly at the creature and fires off at him deadly sarcasms every minute. Every one is indifferent to every one else, and each thing lives or vegetates by its own love. What does it matter to the sun, the beet roots, or even to men whether I do this or that, whether I live or die, whether I suffer or enjoy, whether I dissimulate or am quite open? A bit of straw falls upon an ant and breaks the third leg at the second articulation; a rock falls upon a village and crushes it. I do not think one of these accidents draws more tears than the other from the golden eyes of the stars. You are my best friend, if that phrase is not as hollow as a bell. But is there one of my friends or mistresses who will remember my name twenty years hence, and will recognize me in the

street if I meet them and am out at elbow? Oblivion and nothingness, that is man in his entirety.

I feel that I am as perfectly alone as it is possible to be, and all the threads connecting me with other persons and objects have been broken one by one. There are few instances of a man who, having preserved a knowledge of the movements taking place in himself, has reached such a state of brutishness. I am like one of those flasks of liquors, left standing up, from which in consequence the strength has completely evaporated. The liquid has the same color and appearance, but taste it and you will find it as insipid as water.

When I think of it, I am terrified at the rapidity of this decomposition; if it continues I shall have to be salted, or else I shall inevitably rot, and the worms will attack me when I have lost my soul, for that comprises the only difference between a body and a corpse. A year ago, not more, I had still something human about me; I bestirred myself, I sought. I had one thought more cherished than all the others, a sort of aim, an ideal: I wished to be loved, I dreamed the dreams customary at that age, less vaporous and chaste, it is true, than those of an ordinary young fellow, but still confined within reasonable bounds. Little by little the incorporeal was detached and dissipated, and there only remained in me a deep bed of thick slime. The dream became a nightmare, and the chimera a succubus; the world of the soul has shut its ivory gates in my face. I only realize now what I touch with my hands; I have dreams of stone; everything is condensed and solidified around me; nothing floats or wavers; there is no air, no breath; matter oppresses, overwhelms, and crushes me. I am like a pilgrim who one summer's day fell asleep with his feet in the river and awoke in the winter to find them encased in the ice. I no longer desire the love or friendship of any one; even glory, that brilliant halo I used to so much desire for my brow, has ceased to give me the least longing. There is, alas, now but one desire which palpitates in me, the horrible passion which bears me towards Theodore. To this level have all my notions of morality sunk; that which is physically beautiful is good, but everything which is ugly is evil. If I saw a beautiful woman whom I

knew had a very evil soul, perhaps an adultress and a poisoner, I must admit that would be of no consequence to me, and would in no way prevent her from pleasing me if I found the shape of her nose becoming.

I picture to myself supreme happiness like this. It is a great square building without windows on the outside; a great courtyard surrounded by a colonnade of white marble, having a crystal fountain in the center with a quicksilver stream after the Arabian fashion, and groves of orange trees and pomegranates, placed alternately, stands beneath the bluest of blue sky in the very yellow sunlight; big greyhounds with pointed noses sleep here and there; from time to time negroes with bare feet and golden circlets about their legs, and beautiful servants white and slender, dressed in rich and fanciful attire, pass between the arches with baskets on their arms or pitchers on their heads. I am reclining motionless and silent beneath a magnificent dais surrounded by piles of cushions, with a great tame lion at my elbow, and the bare throat of a young slave under my foot as a footstool as I smoke opium from a great jade pipe.

I do not picture Paradise any different from that; and if it is God's will that I go there after death He will have built for me in a corner of some star a little kiosk after that pattern. Paradise, as it is usually depicted, seems to me much too musical, and I confess in all humility that I am quite incapable of enduring a sonata lasting even ten thousand years.

"You see what my Eldorado, my promised land, is like; it is a dream, like everything else, but it has this speciality about it, that I never introduce a familiar figure into it; no one of my friends has ever crossed the threshold of this palace of the imagination; no woman I have ever loved has sat by my side upon its velvet cushions; I am there alone in the midst of shadows. All the women's faces, all the graceful shadows of young girls with which I people it I have never had any thought of loving; I have never supposed them to be in love with me. In this fantastic seraglio I have created no favorite sultana. There are negresses, mulattoes, Jewesses with blue skins and red hair, Greeks and Circassians, Spaniards and English women; but they are only to me symbols of color and

line, and I have them just as a man keeps all sorts of wine in his cellar and all sorts of humming birds in his aviary. They are pleasure machines, pictures which need no frame, statues which come if they are called when the fancy takes their master to look at them from close quarters. A woman has over a statue this incomparable advantage: she turns of her own accord in the desired direction, instead of, as in the case of the statue, having to be turned and placed by oneself at the right angle; that is fatiguing.

You can see that with such ideas I am out of place in this century and world, for a man cannot subsist like that outside time and space. I must discover some other way.

Thinking like this, such a conclusion is both simple and logical. As only the satisfaction of the eye, the perfection of form and purity of line is sought, they are accepted wherever they are met. That is the explanation of the strange aberrations of ancient love.

Since Christ no single statue of man has been created in which youthful beauty has been idealized and reproduced with that care which characterized the ancient sculptors. Woman has become the symbol of moral and physical beauty; from that day man has really declined. Woman is the queen of creation; stars unite to form a crown for her head, the crescent of the moon considers it glorious to act as a circle beneath her feet, the sun gives up its purest gold to make her jewels, painters who wish to flatter the angels give them women's faces, and I am not the person to blame them for it. Before the Christian era it was quite different. The gods or heroes artists desired to make seductive, were not feminized; they had a type, vigorous and delicate at the same time, but always masculine, however amorous were their contours, however bright and devoid of muscles were their legs and glorious arms. Female beauty is more easily adapted to these characteristics. The shoulders are broadened, the hips reduced in size, the throat is made more protruding, while the coupling of the arms and thighs is more strongly marked. There was hardly any difference between Paris and Helen. In this way the hermaphrodite is one of the most ardently caressed chimæra of ancient idolatry.

This son of Hermes and Aphrodite is one of the most pleasant creations of pagan genius. Nothing more delightful can be imagined than the harmonious blending together of two such perfect bodies, of these two beauties so equal and yet so different, to form one being superior to both, because of their tempering influence upon each other. To an exclusive lover of form is there any more pleasurable uncertainty than that into which he is thrown by the sight of that back, those doubtful thighs, and those fine strong legs which he hardly knows whether to attribute to Mercury ready for flight or Diana emerging from her bath? The torso is a combination of the most charming monstrosities. To the plump and full breast of the youth with strange grace the throat of a young virgin is attached. Theodore would certainly be an excellent model for that type of beauty, though I think the feminine part is in the ascendant in his case.

The strange thing is that I no longer think of his sex, but love him with perfect security. Sometimes I try to persuade myself that this love is abominable, and I use the most severe expressions about myself; but that only comes from the lips; it is an argument I create myself and do not feel. It seems to me that my love is the most ordinary thing in the world, and that any one else in my place would do the same.

I see him, I listen to him talking or singing, for he sings admirably, and I take an unutterable pleasure in so doing. He has the effect of a woman so strongly upon me that one day in the heat of conversation I called him "Madam," making him laugh by so doing, though his laugh seemed to me somewhat forced.

If he is a woman, what can his motive be for disguising himself in this way? I cannot offer any explanation of it. For a young, handsome, and beardless youth to disguise himself as a woman is conceivable; it opens a thousand doors which would otherwise remain closed, and may lead him into a complication of adventures quite pleasant and amazing. In that way a closely guarded woman can be reached, and the result of her surprise may be the man's happiness. But I do not know what advantage there can be in a beautiful woman going about the country dressed as a man. She can only ruin

herself by it. A woman must in this way renounce the pleasure of being courted, serenaded, and adored; she would rather forfeit her life than that, and she is right, for what is a woman's life without it? Nothing, or something worse than death. I am always surprised that women of thirty or those who are pitted by smallpox do not jump from the top of a tower. In spite of it all something stronger than argument cries out to me that Theodore is a woman, the woman of my dreams, she whom alone I can love and who will love me. Yes, Theodore is the goddess with the glance of an eagle, and the beautiful royal hands which condescendingly beckon to me from her throne of clouds. She has presented herself to me in this disguise to prove me, to see if I shall recognize her, if my amorous glance will penetrate the veil in which she has enveloped herself, just as in fairy tales the fairies first appear in the guise of beggars and then suddenly rise resplendent in gold and precious stones.

I recognized you, my love! At the sight of you my heart leapt in my breast; a bright light appeared in the sky; I smelt something like the odor of the divine ambrosia; I perceived at your feet the trail of fire, and I at once realized that you were not an ordinary mortal.

Ah, I see it all now; previous to this time I have been but a dead man; now I am rid of my shroud and stretching out of my grave two feeble hands towards the sunlight; my blue and spectral color has left me. My blood flows rapidly through my veins. The terrible silence which reigned around me is at last broken. The opaque and black vault which weighed upon my forehead is illuminated. A thousand mysterious voices whisper in my ear; beautiful stars twinkle above me and light up the windings of my path; the marguerites softly laugh at me, and the bells murmur my name with their swinging tongues. I understand a number of things I never realized before, I discover marvelous sympathies and affinities, I listen to the song of the roses and the nightingales, and I now fluently read the book which before I could not even spell. I realize that I have a friend in the old oak with its mistletoe, and that the frail and languorous periwinkle with its great blue eye always on the verge of tears has for a long

while cherished for me a discreet and reserved affection. It is love which has opened my eyes and solved the enigma for me. Love has descended to the bottom of the vault where lay my covering somnolent soul; he has taken it by the hand and helped it up the narrow stair leading to daylight. All the doors of the prison house have opened, and for the first time this poor Psyche has emerged from her prison.

My life has become different. I breathe through the lungs of another, and the blow which wounds him will kill me. Before this hour I was like one of those melancholy Japanese idols which have their eyes always fixed upon their bellies. I was the spectator of myself, the audience of the comedy I was playing; I watched myself live, and I listened to the beating of my heart as to the ticking of a clock. That is all. The images appeared to my unseeing eyes; sounds struck my inattentive ears; but nothing from the outer world reached my soul. I even doubted whether there was any other existence than mine, and I am scarcely yet convinced. It seemed to me that I was alone in the midst of the universe, and that all the other people were only smoky images, vain illusions, fugitive shapes destined to people this nothingness. What a difference!

Yet if my presentiment has deceived me; if Theodore is really a man, as the world believes him to be! Marvelous beauty such as he possesses is sometimes seen. Youth lends itself to this illusion. But that is a thought I must not encourage, for it will make me mad; the seed which yesterday fell upon the sterile rock of my heart has already penetrated; it has taken deep root and is now impossible to pluck out. It is already a green flowering tree with strong and twisted roots. Even if I were to find out with certainty that Theodore is not a woman, alas, I do not know whether I should not love him still.

CHAPTER X

My beautiful friend, you were quite right to try and dissuade me from the project I conceived of seeing men, and studying them thoroughly, before giving my heart to any one of them. I have had all love extinguished in me, and even all possibility of love.

Poor young girls that we are; brought up with such care, so chastely surrounded by a triple wall of precautions and reticences, allowed to hear and suspect nothing, while our principal accomplishment is to know nothing, in what strange errors do we live, and what curious visions take us in their arms!

Ah! Graciosa, thrice cursed be the minute when the idea of this disguise came to me; what horrors, infamy, and vulgarity I have been forced to witness or hear! What a treasure of chaste and precious ignorance I have dissipated in so short a time!

It was a beautiful moonlight night, do you remember? We were walking together at the end of the garden, in that mournful and little-frequented avenue with a statue of a fawn playing the flute at one end (the statue had lost its nose and was covered with thick dark moss), and at the other an artificial view painted on the wall, which had been half effaced by the rain. Through the thin foliage of the grove the stars were visible. A smell of young shoots and fresh plants came to us from the flower beds on the wings of a slight breeze; a bird from his hiding place whistled a strange and languorous song. We, as young girls always do, talked of love, suitors, marriage, and of the fine gentlemen we had seen at Mass; we put together the few notions of the world we possessed; we turned over in a hundred different ways a phrase we had overheard, the meaning of which was not clear to us; we asked one another the thousand absurd questions which perfect innocence alone could imagine. How primitive was the poetry, how adorable the foolishness we two little schoolgirls exchanged!

You desired as a lover a brave and proud young man with black hair and mustache, large spurs, great feathers, and a mighty sword, in fact a sort of amorous bully, and you surrendered to the heroic and triumphant. You only dreamt of duels, escalades, and miraculous devotion, and you would gladly have cast your glove into the lion's den, so that your Spaniard might recover it for you. It was very comic to see a little girl as you then were, blonde, blushing and starting at the slightest sound, uttering such generous tirades in a breath with the most martial air in the world.

Though I was but six months older than you, I was six years less romantic. One thing caused me the greatest anxiety, and that was to find out what men said to one another and what they did when they left drawing rooms and theaters. I foresaw in their life many defective and obscure sides, carefully veiled from our eyes, which it was very important for us to find out. Sometimes, hidden behind a curtain, I spied from a distance upon the gentlemen who came to the house, and there then seemed to be something ignoble and cynical mixed with their attractiveness, a gross recklessness or preoccupation which I did not find in them when they entered, and which they seemed to discard as if by enchantment on the threshold of the room. Every one, young as well as old, appeared to me to have uniformly adopted the mask of convention, sentiments of convention, and conventional conversation, when they were in the presence of women. From the corner of the drawing-room where I sat up straight without leaning back on my seat, twisting my bouquet in my fingers, I listened and watched; my eyes were lowered, but still I saw all that was going on to the right and left of me, before and behind me; like the fabulous eyes of the lynx mine pierced walls, and I could have told all that was taking place in the next room.

I also noticed a remarkable difference in the way in which the married women were treated; discreet and polite phrases, like those addressed to myself and my companions, were not used, but a more familiar humor was employed, manners less sedate and more loose were in vogue, while the obvious reticences and the brief subterfuges of a corruption which knows

that it has a like corruption, opposed to it were in evidence. I realized that between them there was a common element which did not exist between us, and I would have given all I possessed to know what that element was.

With what anxiety and curious fury did I follow with eye and ear the chattering and laughing groups of young people, and the couples who exchanged ambiguous glances as they strolled about. Incredulous sneers were on their disdainful lips; they seemed to be laughing at what they had just said, and to be retracting the compliments and adulation they had just bestowed upon us. I did not hear their words; but I understood by the movement of their lips that they were pronouncing words in a tongue unknown to me, and one which had never been used in my presence. Even those who had the most modest and humble air raised their heads with a quite visible air of revolt and boredom; a sigh of breathlessness like that of an actor who had just come to the end of a long speech unwittingly escaped them, and when they left us they made a half turn on the heel in a quick and hurried fashion which betokened internal satisfaction at being delivered from their onerous duty of being honorable and gallant.

I would have given a year of my life to have heard, without being seen, an hour of their conversation. Often I gathered from certain attitudes, gestures and oblique glances that I myself was under discussion, either as regards my age or my appearance. Then I was upon tenter hooks; the few indistinct words, the few scraps of a phrase which reached me at intervals roused my curiosity to its highest pitch without power to satisfy it, and I was involved in strange doubts and perplexities.

Very often the remarks seemed to be complimentary, and that was not what disturbed me. I cared little enough whether I was considered beautiful, but the observations whispered in the ear, and almost always followed by long titters and winks, were what I should have liked to overhear, and for one of those phrases uttered in an undertone, behind a curtain or in a doorway, I would have sacrificed without regret the most flowery and perfumed conversation.

If I had had a lover, I should have delighted in knowing

how he spoke of me to other men, and in what terms he boasted of his good fortune to his boon companions, with a little wine in his head and his elbows upon the tablecloth.

Now I know, and the knowledge angers me. It is always thus.

My idea was a mad one, but what is done is done, and I cannot unlearn what is learned. I did not listen to you, my dear Graciosa; I repent it; but one does not always listen to reason, especially when it comes from such a pretty mouth as yours, for I do not know why it is not possible to think advice good unless it proceeds from an old grayhead. Just as if being stupid for sixty years can make a person clever.

But that desire tormented me too much, and I could not contain myself. I burned in my little skin like a chestnut on the stove. The fatal apple hung in the boughs above my head, and in the end I had to bite it, sure of being able to throw it away afterwards if the taste seemed bitter.

I did as the blonde Eve, my very dear grandmother, did, I bit it.

The death of my uncle, my only remaining relative, leaving me free to act as I chose, I put into execution the plan of which I had so long dreamed. My precautions were taken with the greatest care, so that no one should suspect my sex. I had learned to fence and shoot; I rode a horse perfectly, and with a boldness of which few riders were capable; I studied the way to wear the clothes, and in a few months I made of a pretty girl a much finer cavalier, the only thing lacking being the mustache. I realized my property and left the town, determined not to return till I had the fullest experience.

It was the only way of setting at rest my doubts; lovers would have taught me nothing, or at least I should only have received an incomplete insight, and I wished to study man completely, to dissect him fiber by fiber, with an inexorable scalpel, and stretch him alive and palpitating upon my operating table; for that it was necessary to see him alone, at his ease, to follow him in his walks and in his orgies. In my disguise I could go everywhere without being noticed; nothing was hidden from me, all constraint and reserve were put aside in my presence; I received confidences, and made false

ones to invite the true. Alas! woman, you have only read man's romance not his history!

It is a frightful thing to think how profoundly ignorant we are of the life and conduct of those who appear to love us and whom we marry. Their real existence is as perfectly unknown to us as if they were the inhabitants of Saturn, or of some other planet a hundred million miles away from our sphere; they seem to be of another species, and there is not the slightest intellectual bond between the two sexes; the virtues of the one make the vices of the other, and that which makes the man admired makes the woman honored.

Our life is clear and can be seen at a glance. It is easy to follow us from the home to the school and from the school to the home; our actions are a mystery to nobody. Our sonatas and romances are executed with the most desirable coldness. We are well and duly fastened to our mother's apron strings, and at nine o'clock, or ten o'clock at the latest, we retire to our little white beds in our clean and retired bedchambers, where we are virtuously locked till the next morning. The most wide-awake and jealous susceptibility would find nothing in that.

The most limpid crystal is not as transparent as such a life.

The man who takes us knows what we have done from the moment we were weaned and even before, if he cares to carry his inquiries so far. Our life is not a life, it is a sort of vegetation, like that of mosses and flowers. The glacial shadow of the maternal trunk overhangs us poor stifled rosebuds, who dare not open our blossoms. Our principal business is to hold ourselves upright, to be well corseted, keep our eyes discreetly lowered, and to surpass in immobility manikins and spring dolls.

We are forbidden to enter into conversation, other than to reply "yes" or "no," if we are asked. Immediately the talk becomes interesting, we are sent away to practice on our harp or harpsichord, and our music masters are sixty at least and are horribly addicted to tobacco. The models suspended in our chambers are very vague and sketchy in their anatomy.

Through the desire to prevent us becoming romantic, we are turned into idiots. The days of our education are spent

not in teaching us anything, but in preventing us from learning.

We are really prisoners in body and mind; but how can the young man with full liberty of action, who goes out one morning and does not return till the next, who has money, and can spend it as he pleases, justify the employment of his time? What man would like to tell his beloved what he has done during the day and the night? Not one, even of those reputed the most pure.

I sent my horse and my clothes to a little farm belonging to me, some way from the town. I dressed myself, mounted, and started, not without a sinking at the heart. I had no regrets, I left nothing behind, neither relations nor friends, not a dog nor cat, and yet I was sad, I almost had tears in my eyes; this farm, which I had only visited five or six times, had nothing about it to make it dear to me, but I turned round two or three times to watch from a distance the bluey smoke rising through the trees.

There, with my dresses and skirts, I had left my claim to womanhood; into the room where I dressed were crowded twenty years of my life which no longer counted nor concerned me. Upon the door might have been written "Here lies Madelaine de Maupin"; for really I was no longer Madelaine de Maupin, but Theodore de Sérannes, and no one would again call me by the sweet name Madelaine.

The drawer which contained my now useless dresses appeared to me like the shroud of my white illusions; I was a man, or at least I appeared to be; the young girl was dead.

When the tops of the chestnut trees which surrounded the farm were out of sight, it seemed to me that I was no longer myself, but some one else, and I remembered my former actions as if they were the acts of a stranger at which I was present, or the beginning of a story the reading of which I had not finished.

I recalled a thousand little details, the childish *naïveté* of which brought a slightly mocking and indulgent smile to my lips like that of a young libertine as he listened to the confidences of a boy in the third form; and at the moment I was for ever severing myself, all my childish girlish actions seemed

to be running along by the side of the road making a thousand signs of friendship to me and throwing me kisses.

I spurred my horse to rid myself of these enervating emotions; the trees flew rapidly by on my right and left; but I still seemed to hear my name being called from the roadside: "Madelaine! Madelaine!"

I went on my way; in the sound of the breeze I seemed to recognize the last phrase of the sonata I had learned for my uncle's birthday, and as I passed a house I saw, hanging at a window, the phantom of my curtains. All my past seemed to cling to me to prevent me from going forward and reaching a fresh future.

I hesitated two or three times, and I turned my horse's head in the opposite direction.

But curiosity with its insidious words whispered in my ear, "Go on, Theodore; the opportunity for finding out is a good one; if you do not learn to-day you will never know. Then, too, you will give your noble heart to the first comer who appears honorable and passionate. Men conceal extraordinary secrets from us, Theodore!"

I resumed my gallop. The breeches were on my body, not my spirit; I felt uneasiness and a tremor of fear—to give it its correct name—at a dark spot in the forest; a shot from a poacher nearly made me faint. If it had been a thief the pistols in my holsters and my formidable sword would not have been much use. But, bit by bit, I hardened myself, and paid no further attention to my fears.

The sun sunk slowly down below the horizon like the luster of a theater after the performance is over. Hares and pheasants crossed the road from time to time; the shadows lengthened and distant objects were tinted with red. Some parts of the sky were of a very soft and subdued lilac, others were of lemon and orange tints. The night birds began their song, and a number of strange sounds issued from the wood. The little remaining light vanished, and darkness became complete, increased as it was by the shadows of the trees. I, who had never gone out alone at night, was in the midst of a great forest at eight o'clock at night! Imagine it, Graciosa! I, who nearly died of fright at the end of the garden! Fear

took possession of me; my heart beat terribly. It was, I must admit, with great satisfaction that I espied the lights of the town I was bound for. As soon as I saw the little points of light like tiny terrestrial stars, my fear completely disappeared. It seemed to me that the lights were the eyes of so many friends watching for me.

My horse was no less pleased than I was, and scenting to him the most agreeable smell of a stable, he went straight to the hotel Lion Rouge.

A light shone through the inn windows. I left my horse in charge of an ostler and went into the inn kitchen.

An enormous fireplace opened at the back its red and black jaws, which swallowed a fagot at each mouthful, and on each side of the firedogs, two dogs, as big as men, sat with the greatest unconcern, only raising their paws a little and uttering a sort of sigh when the heat became too intense; most certainly they would rather have been burnt to a cinder than retire a step.

My arrival did not seem to please them, and it was in vain that, in order to become acquainted, I patted them several times; they looked at me in a way which boded no good. That astonished me, for animals usually come to me of their own accord.

The innkeeper came to inquire what I would have for supper.

He was a big-bellied man with a red nose, a wall eye, and an expansive smile. At each word he uttered he displayed a double row of pointed teeth, far apart like an ogre's. The big kitchen knife which hung by his side gave him a doubtful appearance, and seemed to be able to be used for several purposes. When I told him what I wanted he gave one of the dogs a kick. The animal got up and made for a sort of wheel, which he entered with a reluctant and pitiful air, casting a reproachful glance at me as he did so. At last, seeing there was no hope of a respite he began to turn his wheel, and at the same time the fowl upon which I was to sup revolved. I made up my mind to reward him for his trouble with the bits, and while waiting for my supper began to look around the kitchen.

Large oak joists crossed the ceiling, blistered and blackened by the smoke from the fireplace and candles. Upon the dressers gleamed in the shadow pewter dishes brighter than silver and blue and white crockery. Along the walls were rows of well-scoured saucepans, not unlike the ancient shields which used to hang in a row along the sides of the Greek or Roman triremes (forgive me, Graciosa, for the epic magnificence of this comparison). One or two big servants moved around a large table and arranged crockery and knives and forks, producing music most pleasing to the hungry, for then the hearing of the stomach is keener than the ear. To sum up, in spite of the host's appearance, the inn itself had an honest and pleasant enough look; and however unattractive the innkeeper had been, the rain began to beat upon the windows and the wind to howl in a way which would have removed any desire on the traveler's part to go further, for I know nothing more mournful than such sounds on a dark and stormy night.

A thought came to me which made me smile; it was that no one in the world would look for me there. Really, who would have suspected that little Madelaine, instead of being asleep in her warm bed, with her lamp by her side, a novel under her pillow, and her maid in the next room ready to run to her side at the least sound, was sitting upon a straw chair in a country inn twenty leagues from home, with her feet on the firedogs and her little hands buried in her pockets?

Yes, Madeline did not remain, like her schoolfellows, with her elbows idly resting on the edge of the balcony between the convolvulus and the jasmine at the window, gazing over the plain at the violet fringes of the horizon, or at some little rose-colored cloud rounded by the breeze. She had not built in her imagination a palace in which to lodge her chimæra; she had not, like you beautiful dreamers, clothed some hollow phantom with all imaginable perfections. She desired to know men before giving herself to a man; she left everything—her beautiful dresses of bright-colored velvets and silks, her necklaces, her bracelets, her birds, and her flowers; she voluntarily renounced adoration, gallantry, bouquets and madrigals, even the pleasure of being considered more beautiful and better

dressed than yourself, her sweet woman's name, and everything which comprised her life, and the brave girl went away quite alone to obtain throughout the world a knowledge of life.

If it were known people would say Madelaine was mad. You said so yourself, my dear Graciosa; but the real mad women are those who cast their souls to the wind, and sow their love haphazard upon stone and rock, without knowing whether a single seed will take root.

O Graciosa! this is a thought I never had without terror; to love some one who was unworthy! To lay bare my soul to impure eyes, and allow an unbeliever to penetrate into the sanctuary of my heart! To mingle for a time the limpid waters with a muddy stream! However perfectly they might be separated, some of the mud would be sure to remain and the stream would never recover its former transparency.

To think a man had kissed and touched you; had seen your body; that he could say, "She is just so; she has such a mark in a certain place; she has such a shadow in her soul; she laughs because of this and weeps for that; her dream is come to pass; this ring is plaited with her hair; a bit of her heart is folded in this letter; she caressed me in such a way, and that was her usual loving greeting."

Ah! Cleopatra, I now understand why you had killed in the morning your lover of the night. Sublime cruelty it seemed, for which I used to lack sufficient imprecations! Great goddess of pleasure, how deep was your knowledge of human nature, and what penetration there was in that barbarity! You did not desire any living creature to divulge the secrets of your bed; the words of love, snatched from your lips, must never be repeated. You thus retained your pure illusion. Experience did not come to despoil bit by bit this charming phantom you had nursed in your arms. You preferred to be separated from it by a quick blow of the ax rather than by slow-moving disgust. What punishment it must be to a woman to see the man she has chosen lie every minute with the idea that she is enamored of him; to discover in his character a thousand unsuspected meannesses; to see that the thing which has appeared so beautiful through the prism of love is really

very ugly, and that the man who has been taken for a real hero of romance is only a prosaic citizen, wearing slippers and a dressing gown!

I have not Cleopatra's power, and if I possessed it I should certainly not have the strength to use it. So, being unable and unwilling to cut off the heads of my lovers when they leave my bed, and also being unwilling to bear what other women endure, I must of necessity look twice before taking a lover; that is what I shall do three times rather than twice if I feel so inclined, though I doubt it very much, after what I have seen and heard, unless I meet in some happy land a heart like my own, as the novelists say, a pure and virgin heart which has never loved, though capable of love in the true sense of the word; but that is not an easy thing to find.

Several gentlemen entered the inn; the storm and the darkness had prevented them from continuing their journey. They were all young, the eldest being certainly not more than thirty. Their clothes betokened that they belonged to the upper classes, and so did their insolent manners. One or two of them had interesting faces; the others all had, in a more or less marked degree, that sort of brutal joviality and careless good-fellowship which men display among themselves, but of which they entirely rid themselves when they are in our presence.

If they had suspected that the slender young fellow, half asleep upon his chair in the chimney corner, was indeed a young girl (a morsel fit for a king, is the expression they use), certainly they would very quickly have changed their tone, they would have bridled up and spread out their feathers. They would have approached with elaborate politeness, their legs straight, their elbows squared, a smile in their eyes, on their lips, in fact all over them; they would have carefully selected the words they uttered, only making use of phrases of velvet and satin; at the slightest movement on my part they would have seemed to be ready to lie down and take the place of a carpet, so that my delicate feet should not be offended by the inequalities of the floor; their hands would have been outstretched to support me; the most comfortable seat

would have been placed for me in the best position; but I looked like a handsome boy, not a pretty girl.

I admit I almost regretted my skirts when I saw how little attention they paid me. I was, for a moment, quite mortified; for from time to time I forgot that I was dressed as a man, and I was obliged to think or I should have become quite cross.

I was sitting there in silence, with my arms folded, my attention apparently fixed upon the fowl, which was gradually assuming a darker tint, and the unfortunate dog I had so unluckily disturbed.

The youngest of the party gave me a tap on the shoulder, hurting me a little and causing me to utter a little involuntary cry, and asked me if I would not prefer to sup with them rather than alone, inasmuch as a man could drink more in company. I replied that it was a pleasure I had not dared to expect, and that I would gladly do so. The supper was laid at one table, and we took our places.

The panting dog, after lapping up in a moment an enormous bowl of water, resumed his seat opposite the other dog, which had made no more movement than if it had been carved out of stone, the new comers not having ordered a fowl by a fortunate chance.

I learned from a few phrases they let fall that they were bound for the Court, which was then at —, where they were to join several friends. I told them I was a young fellow who had just left the university, and who was returning to his relatives in the provinces by the scholars' usual route, the longest way he could find. That made them laugh, and after a few observations upon my candid and innocent air they asked me if I had a mistress. I replied that I did not know, and they laughed more loudly still. The glasses followed one another with great rapidity; although I took care to nearly always leave mine full, I became a little excited, and never losing sight of my idea, I managed to turn the conversation on to the subject of women. It was not a difficult matter, for after theology and æsthetics it is the subject men most willingly discuss when they are intoxicated.

The friends were not precisely intoxicated, for they carried

their wine too well for that; but they began never-ending moral discussions and unceremoniously put their elbows on the table. One of them put his arm round the ample waist of one of the servants and fondled her most amorously; another swore that he would place a kiss upon each of Jeanette's fat red cheeks. Jeanette gave way with a good grace, and did not even stop a hand which audaciously found its way between the folds of her neckerchief, into the moist valley of her throat, badly protected as it was by a little gold cross, and it was only after a short conversation in an undertone that he let her go to change the dishes.

They were fashionable folk, and certainly unless I had actually seen it I should never have accused them of such familiarities with inn servants. It is probable that they had just left charming mistresses, to whom they had made the most beautiful vows; for really I should never have thought of telling my lover not to soil lips where I had placed mine.

The fellow seemed to take as much pleasure in this kiss as if he had embraced Phillis or Oriane; it was a resounding smack, heavily and solidly applied, leaving two little white marks upon the cheek, the traces of which the girl removed with the back of her hand as she was washing the dishes. I do not believe he had ever given so tender a one to the pure deity of his heart. That was apparently his own thought, for he said in an undertone with a disdainful movement of the elbow:

"To the devil with thin women and noble sentiments." This moral appeared to the taste of the party, and all nodded their heads as a sign of assent.

"Really," the other one said, following out his idea, "I am always unlucky. Gentlemen, I must tell you, under a bond of secrecy, that I have at this moment a passion!

"She is an honorable woman, gentlemen. You must not laugh, for why should she not be an honorable woman? Have I said anything ridiculous? Stop, or if you do not I will throw the house at your head."

"Ah well! What next?"

"She is madly in love with me. Hers is the most beautiful soul in the world; I am as good a judge of souls as I am of horses, and I can guarantee her soul is first quality. There

is in it elevation, ecstasy, devotion, sacrifice, and refined tenderness, in fact everything imaginable; but she has hardly any figure, like that of a girl of fifteen. She is pretty, too; her hand is fine, her foot small; she has too much mind, and not enough flesh. I am very unfortunate. Pity me, friends." Made maudlin by the wine he had drunk, he burst into tears.

"Jeanette will console you for your misfortunes," his neighbor said as he poured him out a bumper; "her soul is so thick it could provide other persons with bodies, and she has enough flesh to clothe the carcasses of three elephants."

O pure and noble woman! if you knew what was said of you at an inn in the presence of strangers by the man you love best in the world, for whom you have sacrificed everything! How he shamelessly exposed you and betrayed you to the intoxicated glances of his comrades, while you in your sorrow, with your chin resting in your hand, were waiting with eyes fixed upon the road by which he would return.

If any one had told you that your lover, twenty-four hours perhaps after leaving you, had made love to a common servant, and kissed her, you would have maintained that such a thing was quite impossible and you would not have believed it; you would hardly have credited your own eyes and ears. Still, there it was.

The conversation lasted for some time, and was the most foolish and licentious possible; but through all the clownish exaggeration and filthy jokes was visible a real and profound sentiment of entire contempt for woman, and I learned more in that evening than in reading twenty cartloads of the works of moralists.

The more heinous and extraordinary things I heard gave my face an expression of sadness and severity which the other guests noticed and about which they twitted me; but my gayety did not return. I had suspected that men were not just as they appeared before us, but I did not believe them so different from the masks they wore, and my surprise equaled my disgust.

It would only require one half-hour of such conversation to correct the romantic tendencies of any young girl; that would be a better remedy than all maternal remonstrance.

Some boasted of their conquests, and the ease and rapidity with which they were made; others communicated recipes for obtaining mistresses, or discoursed upon the tactics to be employed in the siege of virtue; some turned into ridicule the women whose lovers they were, and thus proclaimed themselves to be the greatest imbeciles on earth for being captivated by such sluts. They all made love very cheap.

Such then are the thoughts concealed beneath some handsome exteriors! Who would believe it when seeing these men so humble, so servile, and so obliging? Ah, how boldly after conquest do they raise their heads, and insolently put the heels of their boots upon the face they adored from afar on bended knees! What revenge they take for their temporary debasement! How dearly do they make the women pay for their politeness! What frantic brutality of language and thought is theirs; what inelegance of manners and deportment! It is a complete change, certainly not to their advantage. Though my suspicions had been considerable, they fell far short of the reality.

At last the supper ended and it was time to retire for the night; but as the number of sleepers was double that of the beds, it naturally followed that it was necessary to sleep one after the other or else two together. It was a simple enough matter for the rest of the company, but not so for me, particularly with regard to certain curves and protuberances which, though concealed well enough by the jacket and doublet, would be obvious enough beneath a shirt alone, and really I did not feel disposed to violate my incognito in favor of any of those gentlemen, who just then appeared to me to be real naïve monsters, although I have since decided that they were very good comrades, and at least as good as their fellows.

The one whose bed I had to share was reasonably drunk. He threw himself upon the bed with an arm and leg upon the floor, and went off to sleep at once, not the sleep of the just, but such a deep sleep that the angel of the last judgment would have required to blow the trump in his ear and then perhaps would not have awakened him. This sleep very much simplified matters; I merely took off my jacket and boots,

stepped over the sleeper's body, and lay down next the wall.

So I was sleeping in the same bed as a man! That was not a bad beginning! I confess that in spite of all my assurance I was strangely troubled and disturbed. The situation was so strange, so novel, that I could hardly admit it was not a dream. My bedfellow slept soundly, while I did not close an eye all night.

He was a young man of about twenty-four, good-looking, with black eyelashes, almost a blond mustache, and long black hair; a slight flush was upon his pale cheeks, and his parted lips wore a vague and languishing smile.

I raised myself upon my elbow, and I remained for some time gazing at him in the flickering light of an expiring candle.

We were some distance apart. He was on the extreme outside of the bed, while I lay as a matter of precaution on the other edge.

Certainly all that I had heard was not of the nature to predispose me to tenderness and voluptuousness. I had a horror of men. Still I was very disturbed and more uneasy than I ought to have been; my body did not share the repugnance of my mind as much as it ought. My heart beat fast, I was warm, and turn into whatever position I would, I could not go to sleep.

The most profound silence reigned throughout the inn; only in the distance could be heard the dull thud made by a horse's hoof in the stable, or the sound of a spot of water dropping on the ashes. The candle went out.

The blackest darkness rose between us like a curtain. You cannot imagine the effect produced upon me by the sudden disappearance of the light. It seemed to me that everything was finished, and that I could no longer see my own life clearly. One moment I felt a desire to get up; but what could I have done? It was only two o'clock in the morning, the lights were all out, and I could not wander like a ghost about a strange house. I was forced to stay where I was and wait for daylight.

I was there upon my back, my hands clasped, trying to think of something, but always reverting to the one fact.

that I was sleeping in the same bed as a man. I even felt a desire for him to awaken and discover that I was a woman. Without a doubt the wine I had drunk, though but a small quantity, was to some extent responsible for these extravagant ideas, but I could not help reverting to them. I was in the act of stretching out my arm to awaken him, when a ridge in the bedclothes stopped me; that gave me time to reflect, and while I freed my arm my lost senses returned, if not altogether, at least sufficiently to restrain me.

I certainly did not love the man who caused me this strange agitation. His only charm was that he was not a woman, and in my state of mind that was enough! A man! that mysterious creature from whom we are shielded with such great care, the strange animal of whose history we know so little, the god or demon who alone can realize all the dreams of vague pleasure with which the spring cradles our sleep, and the only thought a girl has after she is fifteen!

A man! The confused idea of pleasure floated in my heavy head. The little I knew still inflamed my desire. An ardent curiosity urged me to satisfy once and for all the doubts which embarrassed me and continually returned to my mind. The solution of the problem was behind the page; it only required turning and the book was at my side. A good-looking fellow, a narrow bed, a dark night! a young girl with a few glasses of champagne in her head! What a suspicious combination! But all that resulted in a most honorable nothing.

Upon the wall where I kept my eyes fixed as the darkness decreased I began to distinguish the window; the panes became less opaque, and the gray morning light as it gradually appeared through them made them transparent; the sky brightened bit by bit: it was daylight. You cannot imagine the pleasure given me by the pale dawn as it revealed the green serge hangings which surrounded the glorious field of battle on which my virtue had triumphed over my desire! It seemed to me that it was my crown of victory.

As for my bedfellow, he had slipped right down to the floor.

I got up, dressed myself as quickly as possible, and hastened

to the window; I opened it and the morning breeze refreshed me. To arrange my hair I went to the mirror, and I was astonished to find my face so pale when I believed it to be purple.

The others came in to see whether we were still asleep, and with their feet aroused their friend, who did not appear to be at all surprised at his position.

The horses were saddled and we resumed our journey.

But that is enough for to-day; my pen refuses to write, and I do not want to take a new one. I will tell you the rest of my adventures another time. Meanwhile, love me as I love you, Graciosa the well named, and after what I have just told you do not have too poor an opinion of my virtue.

CHAPTER XI

MANY things are tiresome: it is a nuisance to have to repay borrowed money which one has come to regard as a gift; it is a trouble to caress to-day the woman one loved yesterday; it is a bore to call at a house at dinner time and find that the owner has gone into the country for a month; it is troublesome to write a novel, and more so to read one; it is a bore to have a pimple on one's nose when one pays a visit to the heart's idol; it is annoying to wear a pair of humorous boots, which smile at the pavement through all the holes in them; it is a bore to be a porter, to be an emperor, to be oneself or even some one else; winter is a nuisance because of the frost, summer because of the heat; but surely the most troublesome thing on earth, in hell, or in heaven is a tragedy, unless it be a comedy or a drama.

That really makes me sick at heart! What can there be more silly or stupid than those great tyrants with the voices of bulls who pace the stage, in flesh-colored tights, waving their arms like the sails of a windmill? Are they not sorry parodies of Bluebeard and the Bogey Man? Their rodomon-

tades would make any one able to keep awake roar with laughter.

Unfortunate lovers are no less ridiculous. It is quite diverting to see them advance, wearing either black or white, with their hair falling upon their shoulders, sleeves weeping over their hands, and the body ready to burst from their corsets like a nut pressed between the fingers; all the while they seem to be dragging the stage after them by the soles of their satin shoes, and in moments of great passion they thrust their trains behind them with a little motion of the heel. The dialogue, entirely composed of an "oh!" and "ah!" which they cluck as they strut about, is really an agreeable dish and one easy of digestion. Their princes, too, are very charming; they are just a little gloomy and melancholy, though this does not prevent them being the best comrades in this world or elsewhere.

As for comedy, which ought to correct manners, and happily does its duty badly, I find that the father's sermons and uncle's twaddle are as soporific on the stage as in real life. I am not of the opinion that the number of fools is doubled by representing them on the stage; there are quite enough, thank God, without that, and the race is in no danger of dying out. Where is the necessity to give a representation of some one with the snout of a pig or the muzzle of an ox, and to listen to the twaddle of an idiot who would be thrown out of the window if he came to one's house? The part of a snob is quite as uninteresting as the snob himself, and being seen through a mirror he is none the less a snob. An actor who could succeed in imitating with exactness the poses and manners of a cobbler would be no more amusing than a real cobbler.

But it is the fantastic, extravagant, and impossible theater I love, where the honest public would pitilessly hiss after the first scene, having failed to understand a word of it.

That is a strange theater. Glow worms take the place of the footlights; a scarab beating time with his antennæ is at the conductor's desk. The cricket takes his part; the nightingale is first flute; little sylphs from the flower of the peas hold violincellos of lemon peel between their legs, which are whiter than ivory, and flourish with plenty of energy their

bows, made of one of Titania's lashes, upon strings of cob-web; the little wig which the scarab, leader of the orchestra, wears trembles with pleasure, and sheds around a luminous dust, so sweet is the harmony and well played the overture!

A curtain of butterflies' wings, finer than the inner pellicle of an egg, rises slowly after the regulation three taps. The house is filled with the souls of poets sitting in the mother-of-pearl stalls, who watch the performance through drops of dew mounted upon the golden pistils of lilies. Their opera glasses are like that.

The scenery is not like any known scenery; the landscape it represents is more unknown than was America before its discovery. The palette of the richest painter has not half the shades displayed in it. Everything is painted in strange and singular colors; green, blue, yellow, and red are lavished upon it.

The sky, of a greenish blue, is striped with wide bands of light and fawn; little thin and delicate trees in the background display foliage of a dried-rose tint; the horizon, instead of fading away in an azure mist, is of the most beautiful apple green, with here and there spirals of golden smoke rising from it. A wandering ray of light rests upon the frontal of a ruined temple or upon the spire of a tower. Towns full of towers, pyramids, domes, arcades, and declivities are located upon hills and cast their reflections into crystal lakes; mighty trees with great leaves, deeply indented by the chisels of the fairies, inextricably intermingle their trunks and branches to make the wings. The clouds in the sky heap themselves up one above the other like snowflakes, and scintillating in the spaces between them can be seen the eyes of gnomes and dwarfs, while their twisted roots plunge into the earth like the finger of a giant's hand. The green woodpecker taps them in tune with his hard beak, and emerald lizards warm themselves in the sun.

The mushroom watches the comedy with his hat on his head, like the insolent fellow he is; the tiny violet rises upon tiptoe between two blades of grass, and opens wide its blue eyes to see the hero pass.

The bullfinch and the linnet sit at the end of the branches to whisper to the actors their parts.

Through the deep undergrowth tall purple thistles and burdocks with velvet leaves wind like silver snakes. Streams composed of the tears of stags at bay sparkle; here and there are to be seen gleaming in the grass anemones like drops of blood, and marguerites wearing upon their heads coronets of pearls, like real duchesses.

The characters are of no period nor land; they come and go without the spectators knowing why or how; they neither eat nor drink, they stay nowhere and have no profession; they possess neither land, income, nor dwelling. Sometimes they carry under their arms a little case of diamonds as large as pigeons' eggs; as they walk they do not dislodge a single dew-drop from the flowers, nor do they raise a single grain of dust on the highway.

Their clothes are the most extravagant and fantastic possible. They wear pointed hats with borders as large as a Chinese parasol, and tremendous plumes from the tail of the bird of paradise or the phoenix. Their capes are striped with brilliant colors; their doublets of velvet and brocade display vests of satin or silver cloth through the gold lace; their hose are puffed out and distended like balloons; while scarlet stockings, embroidered shoes with high heels and large rosettes, little slender swords, points in the air, hilts in the hand, loops and ribbons complete the men's equipment.

The women are no less curiously attired. The drawings of Della Bella and Romain de Hooze give some idea of their apparel; they wear stuffed and undulating dresses, with great folds which glisten like the throats of turtledoves and reflect all the changing tints of the iris; large sleeves from which other sleeves emerge; ruffs of lace, rising higher than the head, for which they serve as a frame; corsets covered with bows, embroidery, aiguillettes, strange jewels, aigrettes of heron plumes, and necklaces of large pearls; they carry fans of peacocks' tails with mirrors in the middle of them and are equipped with everything necessary for a visit to the theater.

It is a taste which is not quite English, German, French, Turkish, Spanish, nor Tartar, though having something of each, taking in the most graceful and characteristic part from each country. Actors attired in this way can say

anything they please without making it appear incongruous.

How amusing and charming are their speeches! These are not the sort of actors to twist their mouths and make their eyes start from their heads in a search after effect; at least they do not give the impression of being workers at their task, or yoked oxen in haste to finish their journey; they are not plastered with powder and rouge to the depth of half an inch; they do not wear daggers of tin, nor do they keep in reserve beneath their cloaks a bladder of blood; they do not wear the same oil-stained rags for entire acts.

They speak without haste, without shouting, like well-bred persons who do not attach much importance to what they are saying. The lover makes his declaration to his mistress with the most unconcerned air in the world; while talking he flicks his thigh with the end of his white gloves. The lady nonchalantly shakes the dew from her bouquet; the lover makes little effort to soften her cruelty, his principal business is to let fall from his lips the pearls and sow with lavish hand the precious stones of poesy; often even he quite effaces himself and allows the author to court his mistress for him. Jealousy is not his failing, and he is of a most accommodating humor. With uplifted eyes he complacently waits till the poet has finished to resume his part and fall down upon his knees.

Everything winds and unwinds itself with admirable carelessness; the effects have no cause, and the causes have no effect. The cleverest person is the one who makes the most foolish remarks; the most foolish persons say the cleverest things; young girls converse in a way which would make old courtesans blush; courtesans give utterance to moral maxims. The most extraordinary adventures succeed each other without any explanation; the noble father arrives posthaste from China in a bamboo junk to recognize a long-lost daughter; the gods and fairies descend to earth and ascend to heaven again. The action plunges into the sea beneath the topaz dome of the waves and traverses the bed of the ocean through forests of coral and madrepores, or ascends to heaven upon the wings of the lark or the griffon. The dialogue is universal. The lion contributes to it with a vigorous "ugh!" the wall speaks through its crevices; and provided that it has a point, a rebus,

or a pun, each is free to interrupt the most interesting scene; the ass's head of Bottom is as welcome as Ariel's fair face. The spirit of the author is displayed in every form; and all these contradictions are like so many facets which reflect its different aspects, while adding the colors of the prism.

This pell-mell and apparent disorder depict real life under its fantastic appearance more exactly than the most minutely studied drama of manners. Every man encloses in himself entire humanity, and in writing whatever enters his head he succeeds better than in copying with a magnifying glass the objects placed about him.

Of this theater, written for the fairies, there is a piece which ought to be performed in the moonlight and delights me greatly; it is a play so inconsequent, the plot of which is so airy and the characters so strange, that the author himself, not knowing what title to give it, called it "As You Like It"—an elastic name which answers for anything.

In reading this strange play you feel yourself transported into an unknown world of which a vague reminiscence lingers; a doubt arises as to whether you are dead or alive, waking or sleeping; gracious faces smile sweetly upon you, and give you a friendly greeting as they pass. You feel moved and troubled at the sight of them, as if suddenly, at a turn of the road, you are about to meet your ideal, or the forgotten phantom of an old mistress will rise up unexpectedly before you. Springs flow with a half-audible murmur; the wind sways with tender sighs the old trees of the ancient forest above the head of the aged exiled duke; and when James the melancholy utters to the stream of water his sorrowful philosophy, it seems as if you are yourself speaking, and as if the most secret and obscure thought of your heart is being revealed and illuminated.

O young son of the brave chevalier Rowland of the Woods, so ill-treated by fortune! I cannot help being jealous of you; you have still one faithful follower, Adam, whose age is so green beneath his white hair. You are banished, but at least you have first struggled and triumphed; your evil brother carries off all your possessions, but Rosalind gives you the necklace from her throat. You are poor, but you are loved;

you leave your own country, but the daughter of your persecutor follows you beyond the seas.

The black Ardennes open their great leafy arms to receive and conceal you; the kind forest gathers in its grottos the softest moss for your bed; it inclines its arches above your head to protect you from rain and sun; it pities you with the tears of its springs and the sighs of its fawns and deer; it turns its rocks into willing desks for your love letters; it lends the thorns of its bushes to suspend them, and orders the satin bark of its aspens to yield to the point of your pen when you wish to write to Rosalind.

If one could, young Orlando, have like you a mighty and shady forest into which to withdraw and isolate oneself in sorrow, and if at the turn of a path one were to meet the woman one sought, recognizable though disguised! But, alas, the world of the soul has no leafy Ardennes, and it is only in the garden of poesy that the little wild and capricious flowers, whose perfume makes one forget everything, grow. In vain do we shed tears, they do not form those beautiful silvery cascades; in vain we sigh, no pitying echo answers us. In vain do we attach sonnets to the thorns of the brambles, for Rosalind does not gather them, and it is of no avail for us to cover the bark of the trees with words of love.

Birds of the sky, each one lend me a feather, the swallow as well as the eagle, so that I may construct a pair of wings with which to fly high and quickly to unknown lands, where I shall find nothing to recall to me the city of the living, where I can forget that I am myself, and live a life strange and new—further off than America, further than Africa, further than Asia, further than the remotest island in the world, by the sea of ice beyond the pole were the Aurora Borealis flashes, in the impalpable realm whither the divine creations of the poets and types of suprenie beauty wing their way.

How is a person to endure the ordinary drawing-room chatter after hearing sparkling Mercutio talk, whose every phrase bursts into a rain of gold and sliver, like a firework bomb beneath a sky studded with stars? What women do not seem ugly by the side of your Venuses, ancient sculptors, poets with marble strophes?

Ah, in spite of the furious embrace with which I wished to envelop the material world failing the other, I feel that I am ill-born, that life is not made for me and that it repels me. I cannot mix in anything; whatever path I follow I lose my way; the level road, the rocky path equally lead me to the abyss. If I wish to take my flight, the air condenses around me, and I remain in captivity with extended wings, unable to close them. I can neither walk nor fly; the sky attracts me when I am on earth, the earth when I am in the sky; in the air the north wind plucks my feathers from me; on earth the stones hurt my feet. I have too tender soles to walk upon real bits of glass; too narrow an expanse of wing to soar in the air, to rise and circle in the profound azure of mysticism to the inaccessible heights of eternal love. I am the most unfortunate hippogriff, the most miserable collection of heterogeneous morsels that has ever existed since the Ocean loved the Moon and women have deceived men; the monstrous Chimera put to death by Bellerophon, with its maiden's head, its lion's claws, its goat's body, and dragon's tail, was an animal of simple composition compared with me.

In my frail breast dwell together the violet-strewn dreams of the blushing maid and the mad passion of the courtesan; my desires come like lions, sharpening their claws in the shade and seeking something to devour; my thoughts, more restless and uneasy than goats, hang from the most dangerous ridges; my hate, steeped in poison, twists into inextricable knots its scaly folds and drags its length in the ruts and ravines.

My soul is a strange land, flourishing and splendid in appearance, but more saturated with putrid and deleterious miasmas than the country of Batavia. The slightest sunshine upon the slime there hatches the reptiles and spreads abroad the mosquitoes; the large yellow tulips and the angsoka flowers pompously veil shameful carrion. The amorous rose opens its scarlet lips, and smiling shows its little teeth of dew to the gallant nightingales who recite madrigals and sonnets to it. Nothing is more charming; but it is a hundred to one that in the grass beneath the bush a dropsical toad is crawling upon its unsteady feet and leaving its track of slime.

There are springs clearer and more limpid than the finest diamond; but it would be better to drain the stagnant water of the morass beneath its covering of rotted rushes and dead dogs than to dip the drinking cup in these pools. A serpent is hidden in their depths which moves with frightful rapidity and disgorges its venom.

If you plant wheat, asphodel, henbane, tares, and hemlock spring up. Instead of the root you plant you will be very surprised to see rise from the earth the rough and twisted limbs of the black mandrake.

If you leave a souvenir there and come some time later to recover it, you will find it more mossy and covered with wood lice and disgusting insects than a stone placed upon the damp earth of a cellar.

Do not try to cross its darkening forests; they are more impracticable than the virgin forests of America and the jungles of Java. Creepers strong as cables hang from tree to tree; plants bristling and pointed like spear heads obstruct all the paths; the earth itself is covered with a burning growth like the nettle. In the arches of the foliage hang by their claws gigantic bats of the vampire species; beetles of enormous size wave threatening horns and beat the air with their fourfold wings; monstrous and fantastic animals, like those we see in nightmares, advance painfully, breaking the reeds before them. There are herds of elephants which crush flies between the wrinkles of their dry skin or rub their flanks against stones and trees, there is the rhinoceros, with its rugged armor, and the hippopotamus with its inflated muzzle and bristling hair, which knead the mud and the débris of the forest with their huge feet.

In the clearings, where a ray of the sun penetrates through the humid atmosphere, at the spot where you would have liked to sit down, you will always find some family of tigers nonchalantly lying and sniffing up the air through their nostrils, blinking their sea-green eyes, and dressing their velvet fur with blood-red tongues covered with papillæ; or else there is a group of boa constrictors half asleep as they digest the last ox they have swallowed.

Fear everything; the grass, fruit, water, air, shade, and sunlight—everything is deadly.

Close your ears to the chatter of the little parrakeets with golden beaks and emerald necks, which come down from the trees and settle upon your fingers with fluttering wings; for though they have golden beaks and emerald necks, they will end by gently pecking out your eyes at the moment you stoop to fondle them.

The world does not require me; it repulses me like a specter escaped from the tombs; my pallor is almost of that nature; my blood refuses to believe that I am alive, and will not color my skin; it trails slowly through my veins like stagnant water in an overgrown canal. My heart does not beat for anything a man's heart should. My sorrows and joys are not those of my fellows. I have violently desired that which no man desires; I have disdained the things most sought after by men. I have loved women when they did not love me, and I have been loved when I would rather have been hated; it has always been either too soon or too late, never just right. I have either not arrived or been too far away. I have cast my life from the windows or concentrated it too much upon a single point; and from the restless activity of the busybody I have come to the mournful somnolence of the Stylite upon his column.

My deeds always have the appearance of a dream; my actions seem rather the result of somnambulism than of a free will; something is in me—I feel it obscurely very deep down—which makes me act without my own participation and always outside common laws; the simple and natural side of things is only revealed to me last of all, and I first of all seize upon the bizarre and eccentric. However little the line slants, I will soon make it into a spiral more twisted than a serpent; the contours, if they are not fixed in the most precise fashion, waver and lose their shape. Faces take a supernatural appearance and look at me with terrifying eyes.

So, by a sort of instinctive reaction, I am always despairingly clinging to the material, to the external silhouette of things, and in art I have given the plastic a very prominent place. I perfectly understand a statue, but I do not under-

stand a man; where life begins I stop and recoil in terror as if I have caught sight of the head of the Medusa. The phenomenon of life causes me an astonishment of which I cannot rid myself. I shall without a doubt make an excellent corpse, for I am a poor enough mortal, and the feeling of my existence completely escapes me. The sound of my own voice surprises me to an unthinkable extent, and sometimes I feel tempted to take it for the voice of another. When I desire to stretch out my arm, and my arm obeys me, that appears to me quite wonderful, and a feeling of the most profound stupefaction overcomes me.

To sum up, Silvio, I perfectly understand the unintelligible; the most extravagant gifts seem to me quite natural and I enter into them with singular facility. I can easily follow the windings of the most capricious and disordered nightmare. That is the reason the kind of plays I mentioned just now pleases me more than any other.

We, Theodore, Rosette, and myself, have great arguments on this subject. Rosette has little taste for my choice, she is in favor of realism: Theodore gives the poet more latitude and admits the truth of convention and illusion; I myself maintain that it is necessary to give the author an absolutely clear field where fantasy can hold entire sway.

Many persons of the company relied principally upon the argument that such plays were generally unsuitable for the conditions of the theater and could not be performed. I replied that it was true in one sense and false in another, just as is almost everything, and that the ideas held of the possibilities and impossibilities of the stage seemed to me to lack precision and savor more of prejudice than of reason, and I said among other things that the play "As You Like It" was certainly quite actable, especially to fashionable people unaccustomed to other parts.

That gave me the idea of performing it. The season is getting on, and every form of amusement is exhausted; we are weary of the chase, of riding and boating parties, while the luck of cards, however varied it may be, is not sufficient to occupy the evenings, so the proposal was enthusiastically received.

A young man who could paint offered to do the scenery; he is now working at it most energetically and in a few days will have finished. The theater is fitted up in the orangery, which is the largest room of the château, and I think all will be well. I shall take the part of Orlando. Rosette had in justice to her to be cast for the part of Rosalind; as my mistress and the lady of the house the part is hers by right; but she did not wish to disguise herself as a man, through some caprice very strange in one in whom prudery is not a failing. If I had not been sure of the contrary, I should have thought she had badly shaped legs. Really none of the ladies of the company wished to appear less scrupulous than Rosette, and that fact nearly wrecked the play; but Theodore, whose part is that of James the melancholy, offered to replace her, considering that as Rosalind is almost always dressed as a man except in the first act, where she appears as a woman, he could with make-up, a corset, and a dress look the part well enough, as he has no beard and a very slender waist.

We are engaged in learning our parts, and it is very curious to see us. In all the lonely corners of the park you are sure to come upon some one book in hand mumbling phrases in an undertone, with eyes raised to heaven and then suddenly lowered, and seven or eight times repeating the same gesture. If it were not known that we were to play the comedy, assuredly we should be taken for a house full of lunatics or poets (which is almost exactly the same thing).

I think we shall soon know enough to have a rehearsal. I am expecting something very curious at it. Perhaps I am mistaken. I was for a time afraid that our actors, instead of performing by inspiration, would attempt to imitate the poses and vocal inflections of some fashionable comedian; but happily they are not ardent enough theater goers to make this mistake, and it is likely that they will display, amid the bashfulness of people who have never before acted, precious gleams of naturalness, and those charming naïvetés which the most consummate talent cannot imitate.

Our young painter has really done wonders: it is impossible to give a stranger appearance to the old tree trunks and the ivy entwining them than he has done; he has taken as his

model the trees in the park, accentuating and exaggerating them in the manner necessary for scenery. Everything is touched with admirable pride and caprice: the stones, rocks, and clouds are mysteriously threatening in shape; gleaming reflections are thrown upon the moving waters, and the usual coldness of the foliage is marvelously relieved by the saffron tints introduced into it by the touch of autumn; the forest varies from emerald-green to purple; the warmest and freshest tones mingle harmoniously, and the sky itself extends from the most tender blue to the most fiery red.

He has designed all the costumes from my sketches; they are most beautiful in character. At first the cry was that they could not be translated into silk and velvet nor any known material, and the moment almost came for the troubadour costume to be generally adopted. The ladies said that the glaring colors would dim their eyes. To this we replied that their eyes were unquenchable stars, and that, on the other hand, their eyes would dull the colors, and even the footlights, the luster, and the sun. They had no reply to make to that; but there were other objections which rejected in a body bristled like the hydra of Lerna; no sooner was the head of one cut off than another, more obstinate and more stupid, took its place.

"How can you expect that to fasten? It is all right on paper, but quite a different matter to wear. I shall never come on wearing that! My skirt is at least four inches too short; I shall never dare to appear like this! This ruff is too high; I look as if I am humpbacked and without a neck. This head dress ages me terribly."

With starch, pins, and good temper everything was smoothed over. "You must be joking! A waist like yours, more slender than a wasp's, which would pass through the ring on my little finger! I will wager twenty-five pounds to a kiss that the corsage will have to be taken in. Your skirt is far from being too short, and if you could only see what an adorable leg you have, you would certainly be of my opinion. Quite the contrary, your neck stands out, and is admirably outlined in its halo of lace. This head dress does not age you at all, and even if you were to appear a few years older,

you are so excessively young that it would be a matter of no consequence to you; really you would give us strange suspicions, if we did not know where the bits of your last doll were."

You cannot imagine the amount of flattery we were compelled to use to persuade our ladies to put on the charming costumes which suited them so well.

What a terrible taste women have! What titanic obstinacy is possessed by a feather-brained little woman who thinks that yellow suits her better than the jonquil or the rose. I am sure that if I had applied to public business half the ruses and intrigues that I have employed to get a red feather placed on the left side instead of the right, I should be a minister or even an emperor.

What pandemonium! What an enormous and inextricable mob must a real theater be!

Since acting the comedy was first mentioned everything here has been in a complete state of disorder. All the drawers are open, all the cupboards empty; it has been a real pillage. The tables and couches are all crowded, there is hardly room to step; prodigious quantities of dresses, cloaks, veils, skirts, capes, and hats trail through the house; and when it is taken into consideration that they are all for the bodies of seven or eight persons, one cannot help unwittingly recollecting those clowns at the fairs who wear eight or ten coats one over the other, and it is not possible to realize that out of this great mass only one costume for each person will emerge.

The servants run hither and thither; there are always two or three of them on the way from the château to the town, and if this sort of thing continues all the horses will become broken winded.

A stage manager has no time to be melancholy, and I have hardly been sad for some time. I am so stupified and plagued that I begin to lose my grip of the play. As I fill the part of the impresario as well as that of Orlando, my task is a double one. When a difficulty arises I am consulted, and my decision not being always regarded as an oracle interminable discussions ensue.

If life consists of being always on one's feet answering

twenty persons at once, ascending and descending staircases, and not having a moment to think during the day, I have never lived so much as during this last week; I do not, however, take as great a part in the movement as you might imagine. The agitation is only skin-deep, and life does not penetrate me as easily as that; although I seem to be acting and mixing in all that is going on, I am at the same time living the least of all. Action stupifies and fatigues me to an extent it is impossible to realize; when I do not act I am thinking, or at least I am dreaming, and that is a mode of existence.

Up to the present time I have done nothing, and I am not aware if I ever shall do anything. I do not know how to control my brains, and that comprises the difference between the man of talent and the man of genius; it is a never-ending effervescence, wave following wave; I cannot master the kind of internal jet which mounts from my heart to my head and which drowns all my thoughts for lack of outlets. I cannot produce anything, not from sterility, but through superabundance; my ideas are so strong and numerous that they are stifled and cannot mature. Never can execution, however rapid, attain such velocity. When I write a phrase the thought it conveys is as far away from me as if a century had elapsed instead of a second, and often it happens that I unconsciously mingle an idea with the one succeeding it.

That is why I do not know how to live, either as a poet or as a lover. I can only reproduce the ideas I have ceased to possess; I only gain the affections of women when I have forgotten them and love others; man, how can I let my mind be seen, since however much I hate myself, I have no longer the consciousness of what I am doing, and I act only according to a full reminiscence?

Take a thought from one's brain; let it be first of all as unpolished as a block of marble roughhewn from the quarry; place it before oneself, and from morning till evening, chisel in one hand and mallet in the other, tap, carve, and scrape; that is a method I could never adopt.

In imagination I can easily evolve the slender face from the rough block, and I can see it very clearly; but there are so

many corners to remove, so many chips to detach, so many taps of the mallet to be delivered before the right shape is attained and the correct contour reached, that my hands become blistered and I let fall my chisel.

If I persist the fatigue becomes so intense that my inner sight is totally obscured, and I cannot see through the opaque marble the white divinity concealed in its depths. Then I pursue it haphazard, as if by a sense of touch; I cut too deeply in one place, and not far enough forward in another. I take away what ought to be the leg or arm, and I have a compact mass where a space ought to be; in place of a goddess I make an ape, and sometimes not even that, and the magnificent block, obtained at such enormous expense and tremendous labor from the entrails of the earth, carved, hewn, and worked in every way, seems rather to have been gnawed and pierced by the polyps to make a hive, than carved by a sculptor on a given design.

How did you, Michael Angelo, cut the marble into slices like a child carving a marrow? Of what steel were your invincible chisels fashioned? What robust strength your prolific artists and workers must have possessed, a strength which no material could resist, to turn your entire dream into color or bronze?

It is an innocent and to some extent permissible vanity after my cruel remarks about myself, Silvio, and I know you are not the one to blame me for it, for me to say that although the universe will never be aware of the fact, and my name is destined from the first for oblivion, I am a poet and a painter! I have ideas more beautiful than any poet in the world. I have created types as pure and divine as those most greatly admired of the old masters. I see them there, before me, as clearly and distinctly as if they were really painted, and if I could open a hole in my skull and insert a glass for others to view, it would be the most marvelous gallery of pictures ever seen. No king on earth can boast of the possession of such a one; the pictures, which are in a style peculiar to myself, would not be disdained by any one. I know it seems strange for me to say this, and that I must appear intoxicated with the most foolish self-conceit; but it is so, and nothing

will shake my conviction. No one, without a doubt, will share it with me.

I have sometimes even a difficulty in concealing my thoughts on this subject; it often happens that I speak with too great familiarity of these lofty geniuses whose lines one ought to adore, and whose statues one ought to contemplate from a distance on bended knee. Once I so far forgot myself as to include myself with them. Fortunately it was to a person who took no notice, or I should have obtained the reputation of being the most tremendous coxcomb who ever lived.

Am I not, Silvio, a poet and a painter?

It is a mistake to think that all persons who obtained the reputation of genius were really greater men than others. It is impossible to say how many pupils and obscure painters Raphael employed on the works which contributed to his reputation; he lent his signature to the imagination and talents of several, that is all.

A great painter, a great writer occupy and fill by themselves alone an entire century; their most anxious desire is to dabble in all sorts of art and literature, so that if rivals arise they can be the first to accuse them of plagiarism and stop them upon the first rung of the ladder of fame; these are well-known tactics and though not new are successful every day.

It sometimes happens that an already famous man has precisely the same sort of talent that you yourself would have had; to avoid passing for his imitator you are obliged to divert your natural inspiration into a different channel.

For this reason many noble minds are forced to take a route which is not their own, and to perpetually skirt their own domain from which they are banished, still happy to be able to cast a furtive glance over the hedge and see open in the sunlight the beautiful variegated flowers, the seeds of which they possess, but cannot sow for lack of ground.

In my own case I do not know whether I should have made any great mark in the world, for I lack the degree of stupidity necessary to become what is absolutely called a genius, and the enormous obstinacy afterwards deified by the beautiful name of will, when the great man has reached the glorious

summit of the mountain, and which is indispensable to reach that spot. I know too well how hollow all such things are, containing, as they do, but putrefaction, to attach myself for too long to any one and pursue it ardently.

Men of genius are very narrow-minded, that is the cause of genius. Their lack of intelligence prevents their seeing the obstacles which separate them from the object they wish to reach; they start, and in two or three strides cover the intervening space. As their mind remains obstinately closed to certain currents, and they only see the things most immediately concerned with their own projects, they attain their object with the least possible expenditure of thought and action. Nothing distracts them, nothing turns them aside; they act rather by instinct than in any other way, and several of them, when removed from their particular sphere, display an incapacity it is difficult to understand.

Certainly it is a rare and charming gift to write verses well; few people please themselves more than I do with poetry; but still I do not desire to bound and circumscribe my life within the twelve feet of an alexandrine; there are a thousand things which disturb me as much as a hemistich, though not the state of society and the reforms it would be necessary to make. I care little enough whether the peasants learn to read or not, or whether men eat bread or browse on grass; but there pass through my head in one hour more than a hundred thousand visions which have not the slightest connection with rests and rhymes, and that is the reason I produce so little while having more ideas than certain poets who ought to be burnt with their own works.

I adore beauty and perceive it; I can utter it as well as the most statuary lovers can convey it, yet I am not a sculptor. The ugliness and imperfection of a rough sketch annoys me; I cannot wait till the work comes by dint of polishing and repolishing to perfection; and if I could make up my mind to allow certain things in what I do, either in verse or painting, I should perhaps end by creating a poem or picture which would make me famous, and those who love me (if there is any one in the world who takes that trouble) would not be compelled to take my word, and would have a triumphant

answer to the sardonic sneers of the detractors of that great unknown genius, myself.

As it is, I cannot even succeed in writing a letter as I should like. I often say things quite different from what I intend; some parts swell quite out of proportion to the rest, while others shrink to vanishing point, and very often the idea I had to communicate is not even to be found in the postscript.

When I sat down to write to you, I certainly had no intention of telling you half of what I have written. I simply wanted to let you know that we were going to perform the comedy; but a word leads to a phrase, one parenthesis produces another, which again gives birth to others. There is no reason why this letter should not extend to two hundred volumes, but that would most certainly be too much.

As soon as I pick up my pen there is a buzzing and rustling of wings in my head, as if multitudes of cockchafers had been liberated there. The sound knocks upon the walls of my cranium, turns, descends, and rises with a horrible din: it is the noise of my thoughts which desire to fly away and seek an outlet; they all try to emerge at once; more than one is injured. Sometimes the doorway is so blocked that not one can cross its threshold and reach paper.

That is the way I am made—not a good way, certainly—but still it cannot be helped! The fault is with the gods, not with me, a poor devil who has no alternative. I have no need to claim your indulgence, Silvio; it is granted me in advance, and you are good enough to read to the end my illegible scrawls, and my dreams without head or tail; however disjointed and absurd they may be, they always interest you, because they come from me, and, I, bad as I am, still have some value in your eyes.

I can show you that which annoys an ordinary man most: a sincere pride. But a truce to all these fine things, and since I am writing to you about our play, I will say a little more about it.

The rehearsal took place to-day; never in my life was I so agitated, not because of the natural embarrassment in reciting in the presence of a number of persons, but for another reason. We were in costume and ready to begin; Theodore

was not yet present; a messenger was sent to his room to see what detained him; he sent word that he was just ready and was coming down.

He came; I heard his footsteps in the corridor before he appeared, and yet no one on earth has a lighter tread than Theodore; but the sympathy I feel for him is so strong that I to some extent divine his movements through the walls, and when I realized that he was about to place his hand upon the handle of the door, a trembling seized me, and my heart beat horribly. It seemed to me that some important event in my life was about to be decided, and that the solemn and long-expected moment had arrived.

The door opened and closed again slowly. There was a general cry of admiration. The men clapped, the women became scarlet. Rosette alone turned very pale and leant against the wall, as if a sudden revelation had come to her; she made in the reverse way the same movement that I did. I always suspected her of loving Theodore.

Without a doubt, at that moment she believed as I did that the sham Rosalind was no less than a young and beautiful woman, and the frail house of cards of her hope suddenly collapsed, while mine rose upon its ruins; at least that is what I thought; perhaps I am mistaken, for I was scarcely in the state to make exact observations.

There were, without counting Rosette, three or four pretty women present; they appeared revoltingly ugly. By the side of the sun, the star of their beauty was suddenly eclipsed, and every one asked himself how it was they only seemed passable. Men who previously had esteemed themselves very fortunate to have them for mistresses would now have hardly taken them as servants.

The image which up to that time had only been vaguely outlined in indistinct contours, the adored but vainly pursued phantom, was there before my eyes alive, palpable, no longer in the twilight and mist, but bathed in white light; not in an ineffective disguise, but in real dress; not in the derisive shape of a young man, but with the features of a most charming woman.

I had a feeling of enormous happiness, as if a mountain

or two had been removed from my chest. I felt the horror I had of myself vanish, and I was delivered from the boredom of looking upon myself as a monster. I returned to the pastoral opinion of myself, and all the violets of spring blossomed in my heart.

He, or rather she (for I want to forget that I was stupid enough to take her for a man) remained for a moment standing at the door, and as if to allow time for the audience to utter its first exclamation. A bright light illuminated her from head to foot. Her long brown hair, ornamented with rows of big pearls, fell in natural curls upon her beautiful shoulders! Her shoulders and breast were bare, and never have I seen any so beautiful; the most noble marble does not approach that exquisite perfection. How the life can be seen through its shadowy transparence! How white and colored at the same time such flesh is! How such fair and harmonious tints make the most of the transition from the skin to the hair! What ravishing poems there are in the soft undulation of those contours, more supple and velvety than the swan's neck! If there were words adequate to describe what I feel, I would write you a fifty-page description; but languages have been made by bunglers who have never gazed attentively at a woman's breast or back, and not half the indispensable terms exist.

I am decidedly of opinion that I must become a sculptor; for after seeing such beauty, to be unable to reproduce it in one way or another is enough to drive a man mad. I have written twenty sonnets upon those shoulders, but that is not enough. I should like something which I could touch with my finger, and which was exactly like the original. Verses only an appearance. Sculpture has all the reality a thing can have. The painter arrives at a more exact appearance, but still it is only an appearance. Sculpture has all the reality a thing completely false can have; it has the multiple aspect, produces a shadow and can be touched. Your sculptured figure only differs from the real in being a little harder and unable to talk: two very slight defects.

Her dress was made of a material which changed color, it was azure in the light and gold in the shadow; a neat

buskin enclosed a foot which did not need it to appear too tiny, and scarlet silk stockings clung amorously around her well-turned and seductive legs; her arms were bare to the elbows, and they emerged plump and white from a round cluster of lace with the splendor of burnished silver and a delicacy of contour quite inconceivable; her hands, loaded with rings, gently waved a large fan of variegated feathers of strange tints, which looked like a little pocket rainbow.

She advanced into the room, her face slightly tinged with a red which was not rouge, and every one was enraptured and excitedly talking as they asked one another if it were possible that this was Theodore de Sérannes, the bold rider, the famous duelist, the determined sportsman, and if they were perfectly certain this was not his twin sister.

Theodore looked as if he had never worn any other costume in his life! He was not the least bit in the world embarrassed in his movements, he walked very well, and was not encumbered by his train; he ogled and played with his fan to perfection. What a fine figure he had! His waist could be spanned by one's fingers! It is wonderful, it is inconceivable! The illusion was as complete as possible; he almost gave the impression of a breast with his fat and bulging chest; and then, too, there was not a hair on his face, and his voice was so soft! Oh, beautiful Rosalind, who would not be your Orlando?

Yes, who would not be Orlando to this Rosalind, even to endure the torments I have suffered? To love as I loved with a monstrous and inadmissible love, which could not be uprooted from the heart; to be condemned to keep the most profound silence, and not to dare to make use of words the most discreet and respectful lover would utter without fear to the most severe and prudish of women; to feel oneself devoured by passions considered mad and inexcusable in the most libertine eyes; what are ordinary passions by the side of that one, shameless in itself, without hope, while its improbable success would be a crime and make one die of shame? To be reduced to a desire for failure, to fear favorable chances and opportunities, and avoid them as another person would seek them, that was my lot.

The deepest discouragement had taken hold upon me; I looked upon myself with horror mingled with surprise and curiosity. The most revolting thing to me was to think that I had never loved before, and that in my case it was the first effervescence of youth, my springtime of love.

This monstrosity in my case took the place of the fresh and shamefaced illusions of that beautiful age. At times when I felt myself most strongly attracted towards Theodore I took refuge in affright in Rosette's arms, although she was distasteful to me; I tried to interpose her between him and myself like a barrier and a shield, and I felt a secret satisfaction in doing so from the thought that she was at least a real woman, and if I no longer loved her, she still loved me enough for the liasion not to degenerate into intrigue and debauchery.

Still I felt in my heart through it all some sort of regret at thus being unfaithful to the idea of my impossible passion; I desired it, and although I was aware that I should never possess the object of my love, I was displeased with myself, and my coldness with Juliette was continued.

The rehearsal was much better than I expected; Theodore in particular was admirable. It was also discovered that I acted very well. It is not that I have the qualities necessary for a good actor, and it would be a great mistake to suppose me capable of taking other parts with the same success; but by a strange chance the words I had to utter so well suited my own state that they seemed to me more like words invented by myself than learned from a book. Memory would have failed me in some places had I not unhesitatingly filled the gap with an improvised phrase. Orlando was myself at least as much as I was Orlando, and it is impossible to find a more marvelous coincidence.

In the scene where Theodore detached the chain from his neck and presented it to me he threw me a glance so gently languishing, so full of promise, and uttered the words with such grace and nobility of phrase, "Brave knight, wear this in memory of me, of a young girl who would give you more if she had more to offer," I was really agitated, and it was only with difficulty that I could continue, "What passion thus weighs upon my tongue and fetters it? I cannot speak to

her, and yet she desires to talk with me. O poor Orlando!"

In the third act Rosalind, dressed as a man and in the name of Ganymede, reappears with her cousin Celia, who has changed her name for that of Aliena.

That scene made a disagreeable impression upon me, for I was already so used to the woman's dress, which gave my desires some hope, and which maintained me in a perfidious but seductive error! One uses oneself very quickly to look upon desires as reality upon the faith of the most fugitive appearances, and I became quite gloomy when Theodore reappeared in man's dress, more gloomy than I was before; for joy only serves to emphasize sorrow, the sun only shines to make the horrors of darkness better understood, and the gayety of the white only has for its object the making of all the sadness of the black stand out more clearly.

His dress was the most gallant and coquettish possible, of an elegant and capricious cut, ornamented with ribbons almost in the style of the exquisites at the Court of Louis XIII; a pointed hat of felt with a long feather shaded his beautiful curls, and a Damascus blade peered from beneath his traveling cloak.

Still he wore his manly habits in such a way as to suggest that they had feminine counterparts; they were larger about the hips and fuller at the chest, with somewhat more wavy lines than clothes assume upon a man's body, leaving only slight doubts as to the person's sex.

His manner was half deliberate, half timid, and with infinite art he gave himself the air of being embarrassed in a costume familiar to him, while he had seemed quite at ease in the costume not his own.

My serenity somewhat returned, and I persuaded myself once more that Theodore was a woman. I recovered sufficient sang-froid to suitably continue my part.

Do you know the play? Perhaps not. During the fortnight in which I have done nothing but read and recite it I have learned it entirely by heart, and I can hardly realize that every one is not as familiar with it as I am. It is a common mistake, which I often make, to think that when I am intoxicated the whole of creation is so too, and beating the walls;

and if I knew Hebrew it is certain I should ask my servant in Hebrew for my dressing gown and slippers, and be very surprised he did not understand me. You shall read it if you please; I shall proceed as if you have read it, and only touch upon the parts which refer to my situation.

Rosalind, walking in the forest with her cousin, is very surprised to find the bushes bearing, instead of mulberries and sloes, madrigals in her praise. It was a strange crop such as fortunately is not usually found upon the hedgerows, for when one is thirsty it is better to find good mulberries on the branches than bed sonnets. She is very anxious to know who has in this way spoiled the bark of the young trees. Celia, who has already met Orlando, tells her, after long entreaty, that the rhymer is none other than the conqueror of Charles the Duke's wrestler.

Soon Orlando himself appears, and Rosalind enters into conversation by asking him the time. That truly is a most simple beginning; nothing in the world could be more commonplace. But have no fear. From that vulgar and ordinary phrase you will see at once arise a number of unexpected conceits, full of flowery and singular comparisons, as from the most fertile land.

After a few lines of sparkling dialogue, in which every word, falling upon the phrase, makes millions of sparks fly right and left like a hammer upon a bar of red-hot iron, Rosalind asks Orlando if by any chance he knows the man who hangs odes upon the hawthorn and elegies upon the briars, and who seems to be attacked daily by a love malady, one she knows perfectly well how to cure. Orlando confesses that he is the man so tortured by love, and since he has boasted of several prescriptions to cure the malady, will he be good enough to tell him one. "You a lover?" Rosalind replies. "You have none of the symptoms by which a lover is recognized; you have neither thin cheeks nor black-rimmed eyes; your stockings do not hang down about your heels, your sleeves are not unbuttoned, and the bow of your shoes is tied with much grace; if you are in love with any one it is certainly with your own person and you have no use for my remedies."

It was not without real emotion that I gave the reply in these words:

"Handsome young fellow, I would like to be able to make you believe I love you."

This strange and unexpected reply, which is not brought about by anything, and which seemed to have been written expressly for me as if by the poet's prescience, had a great effect upon me when I uttered it to Theodore, whose divine lips were still slightly distended by the ironical expression of the phrase he had just uttered, while his eyes smiled with inexpressible sweetness, and a clear ray of kindness gilded the upper part of his young and beautiful face.

"I believe it? It is easy enough to persuade the woman who loves you, and yet she will not readily admit she loves you, and that is one of the subjects on which women always give their conscience the lie; but in all sincerity are you the person who fastened to the bushes all those beautiful eulogies of Rosalind, and why should you actually need a remedy for your folly?"

When she is quite certain that it is he, Orlando, and no other, who has written these admirable verses which walk upon so many feet, beautiful Rosalind consents to tell him her remedy. This is what it comprises: she is to pretend to be the sufferer's beloved, and he is obliged to make love to her as to his real mistress, and to disgust him of his passion she gives way to the most extravagant caprices; sometimes she weeps, sometimes she laughs; one day she receives him kindly another badly; she scratches him and spits in his face; she is not for a moment like her real self; she is simpering, flighty, prudish, and languorous in turn, and all the outrageous fancies, boredom, hysterics, and blue devils can produce in the empty head of a mistress the poor fellow has to endure. An imp, monkey, and lawyer united would not have invented more spite. This miraculous treatment did not fail to produce its result; the lovesick man fell from excess of love into a state of madness, which caused him to acquire a horror of the whole world, and he ought to have ended his days in a monastic retreat—a not very satisfactory though likely conclusion.

Orlando, as can well be believed, did not care to return to health by such means; but Rosalind insisted and wished to undertake the cure. She used this phrase, "I would cure you if you would only consent to call me Rosalind and visit me every day in my hut," with such marked and obvious intent and such a strange glance, that it was impossible not to attach to it a wider meaning than the mere words conveyed, and not to see in it an indirect warning against declaring my real sentiments. When Orlando replied, "Willingly, amiable young man," she gave her answer in a still more significant tone, "No, no, you must call me Rosalind."

Perhaps I was mistaken, and thought I saw something which did not really exist; but it seemed to me that Theodore had perceived my love, although certainly I had never betrayed it by a single word. It was quite impossible for a woman as clever as she must be, and who had seen as much life, not to have understood what was passing in my soul. Without words my eyes and my trouble were sufficient evidence, and the veil of ardent friendship which I had thrown over my love was not so impenetrable but that an attentive and interested observer could easily see through it. The most innocent and unsophisticated maiden would not have been deceived for a moment.

Some important reason unknown to me without a doubt compelled this cursed disguise, the cause of all my torment. Without it everything would have been easy; I should have been able to give way with sweet security to the most varied amorous reveries, and take in my own the little white and silky hand of my divinity without a shudder of horror, and without recoiling twenty paces, as if I had touched a red-hot iron or felt the talons of the real Beelzebub.

Instead of despairing and acting like a real maniac, of beating my breast with remorse and bewailing, I should have told myself with a satisfied conscience, "I am in love"—a phrase as agreeable to utter in the morning with one's head upon a soft pillow in a warm bed as any other imaginable phrase of three words, except the one "I have money."

After getting up I could have taken up a position in front of my mirror and looked at myself with a sort of respect,

and I should have been moved by my own poetic pallor as I arranged my hair. Then I should have breakfasted with gravity and contrition in order to feed this dear body, this precious box of passion.

After breakfast I should have interwoven a few rhymes into a sonnet in honor of my princess. After the sonnet had been finished and transcribed upon glazed and perfumed paper I should have experienced the feeling that I was a hundred cubits high, and must stoop lest my head should reach up into the sky and become entangled in the clouds (a wise precaution), and I should have to retail my new production to all my friends, to all my enemies, then to children at the breast and to their nurses, then to horses and donkeys, and finally to walls and trees, to find out the opinion of creation upon my latest effort.

At receptions I should have adopted a doctorial tone with the women, and sustained discussions on sentiment in grave and measured tones, like a man who knew much more than he cared to say about the particular subject, and who had not obtained his knowledge from books; such a pose never fails to produce a marvelous effect and fainting fits among the women present, who cease their idle chatter.

I could have led the happiest life possible—stepped on a pet dog's tail without making its mistress cry out, overturned stands of old china, and at meals eaten the choice bits without leaving them for the rest of the company; it would all have been excusable on the score of a lover's well-known distraction; and as they saw me swallow everything with a bewildered expression people would have said, "Poor fellow."

Then with a dreamy and mournful manner how untidy I might have been, how I could have traversed the avenues in the park sometimes with huge strides, sometimes with a mincing step, like a man whose reason had completely departed!

But the gods ordered otherwise.

I am enamored of a beauty in doublet and boots, of a proud woman who disdains the habits of her sex, and one who leaves me at times in a sea of perplexity; her features and body are a woman's, but her mind is undoubtedly a man's.

My beloved is skillful with the foils; she has fought several

duels and killed or wounded three of four persons; she is daring on horseback, and is like an old gamekeeper when out shooting. They are strange qualities for a sweetheart, but I am the only person to whom such a thing would happen.

I laugh, but certainly without reason, for I have never suffered so much, and the last two months have seemed two years, or rather two centuries. There has been in my head an ebb and flow of uncertainty enough to stupefy the strongest mind; I have been so violently agitated and worried in every way, and I have suffered such furious outbursts, such mournful debility, such extravagant hopes and such profound despair, that I do not know how I have survived it all. This idea has occupied and filled my mind so that I have been astonished; it was not visible through my body like a candle in a lantern, and I have been in a state of mortal dread lest any one discovered the object of my mad affection. Moreover, Rosette being the person who was most interested in overlooking the movements of my heart, has not appeared to notice anything; I believe she has been too much engaged in loving Theodore to pay any attention to my cooling affection for her; or else I am a past master in dissimulation, and I am not fatuous enough to believe that. Theodore has not shown that he has the least suspicion of the state of my soul, and he has always spoken to me in a familiar and friendly way, as a well-bred fellow talks to a friend of the same age, but nothing more. His conversation with me has turned upon all sorts of subjects—art, poetry, and the like; but there has been nothing confidential or definite in it in relation to either of us.

Perhaps the motives for his disguise no longer exist and he will soon resume his proper attire. I am quite ignorant on the subject. Still Rosalind uttered certain words with particular inflections, and in a very marked fashion accentuated all the passages in the part which had an ambiguous significance or could be construed into ambiguity.

In the scene of the meeting, from the moment she reproaches Orlando for not arriving two hours earlier like a real lover, but being two hours late, to the grievous sigh which, frightened at the depth of her passion, she utters as she throws herself into Aliena's arms, "O cousin! cousin!

my pretty little cousin! if you knew how deeply I am immersed in the abyss of love!" she displayed miraculous talent. It was a mixture of tenderness, of melancholy and irresistible love; her voice trembled with emotion, and behind the laugh one felt that the most violent love was ready to explode; add to that the piquancy and strangeness of the transposition and the novelty in seeing a young man making love to his mistress, whom he takes for a man and who appears to be one.

Expressions which would have appeared ordinary and commonplace in other circumstances now assumed particular prominence, and all the lover's comparisons and protestations which took place upon the stage seemed to be recoined with a fresh stamp; besides, had the thoughts, instead of being as charming and choice as they were, been worn threadbare, the way in which they were uttered would have imbued them with the most marvelous cleverness and best possible taste.

I have forgotten to mention that Rosette, after declining the part of Rosalind, had good-naturedly taken the small part of Phebe. Phebe is a shepherdess of the forest of the Ardennes, devoutly adored by the shepherd Sylvius, whom she cannot endure and treats with the utmost harshness. Phebe is as cold as the moon; she has a heart of snow which does not melt at the fire of the most ardent sighs, while its icy covering increases more and more in thickness and becomes as hard as the diamond; but as soon as she sees Rosalind in the clothes of the handsome page Ganymede the ice melts into tears and the diamond becomes softer than wax. The proud Phebe who laughed at love is herself in love; now she suffers the torments she made others endure. Her pride evaporates, she makes all the advances, and she sends by poor Sylvius to Rosalind an ardent letter which contains the confession of her passion in the most humble and suppliant terms. Rosalind, touched with pity for Sylvius, and having the most excellent reasons for not reciprocating Phebe's love, makes her endure the harshest of treatment and jeers at her with unparalleled cruelty and fury. Phebe, however, prefers this treatment to the most passionate and delicate madrigals of her unhappy shepherd; she follows the beautiful unknown everywhere, and the sweetest admission she can obtain by her

importunity is the promise that if ever he marries a woman she shall certainly be the one. Meanwhile he instructs her to treat Sylvius kindly, and not to cherish too pleasant hopes.

Rosette plays her part with sorrowful and caressing grace in a voice the sad and resigned tones of which touch the heart; and when Rosalind says to her, "I would love you if I could," the tears stand in her eyes and she can hardly keep them back, for the story of Phebe is her own story just as Orlando's is mine, with the difference that there is a happy ending for Orlando, while Phebe, deceived in her love, is deprived of the charming ideal she wishes to embrace and is destined to marry Sylvius. Life is thus ordered, one person's happiness is of necessity another's sorrow. It makes me very happy to think that Theodore is a woman; it is very unfortunate for Rosette that Theodore is not a man, and she is now involved in the amorous impossibilities from which I have escaped.

At the end of the play Rosalind leaves off her disguise as the page Ganymede, and in the garments of her own sex is recognized by the Duke as his daughter and by Orlando as his mistress. The god Hymen arrives; three weddings take place. Orlando marries Rosalind, Phebe weds Sylvius, and Touchstone the clown espouses the naïve Audrey. Then comes the epilogue and the curtain falls.

The play occupied and extremely interested us all. There was to some extent a play within a play, a drama, invisible and unknown to the other spectators, which we acted for ourselves alone, and which in symbolical words summed up our whole lives and expressed our most secret desires. Without Rosalind's strange expedient I should have been more suffering than ever, without even a hope of a future cure, and I should have continued to wander sadly through the oblique paths of the dark forest.

Still I have only a moral certainty; I lack proof, and I can remain no longer in this state of uncertainty; I must speak to Theodore in a more definite fashion. I have approached him twenty times with a phrase ready, without being able to utter it; I dare not. I have many opportunities to talk to him privately in the park, in my room, or in his chamber, for

he comes to see me and I go to see him, but I let them pass without making use of them, although a moment afterwards I have a feeling of terrible regret and am greatly enraged with myself. I open my mouth, and unwittingly other words take the place of those I wish to utter; instead of declaring my love I talk of the rain and the fine weather or some other similar stupidity. But the season will soon be over, and people will go back to the city. The opportunities I have here will not occur elsewhere; we shall perhaps lose sight of one another, and streams will without a doubt bear us away in opposite directions.

The liberty of the country is so charming and convenient! Even the trees in the autumn with their dropping leaves offer delightful shades to the reveries of a newborn love! It is difficult to resist the environment of beautiful nature—the birds with their languorous songs, the flowers with their intoxicating perfumes, and the slopes of the hills with their golden and silky verdure! Solitude inspires a thousand voluptuous thoughts which the bustle of the world will disperse or scatter here and there, and the instinctive movement of two beings who can hear their hearts beat in the silence of a deserted country, is to entwine their arms more closely and lean one upon the other as if they are the only two living persons left in the world.

I went for a walk this morning; the weather was warm and damp, and there was no sign of blue in the sky; yet it was neither somber nor threatening. Two or three tones of pearl-gray harmoniously blended completely covered the heavens, and over this background slowly passed woolly clouds like great pieces of cotton; they were driven by a gentle breeze hardly strong enough to move the tops of the aspens; clouds of mist arose between the chestnuts and indicated the course of the river.

The horizon was so enveloped in mist that it was hardly possible to see the exact point where the sky began and the earth ended. Through this curtain the willows looked more like the specters of trees than real trees; the outlines of the hills were more like the undulations of a cloud bank than solid earth.

As I walked I thought that the autumn had also come for me, and that a brilliant summer had passed never to return; the tree of my soul was perhaps still more leafless than the trees in the forest; there hardly remained on its loftiest branch one little green leaf quivering with sorrow at the loss of its fellows.

Remain upon the tree, little leaf of the color of hope; cling to the branch with all the strength of nerves and fibers; be not frightened by the whistling of the wind, good little leaf! For when you have left me, who will be able to distinguish whether I am a living or a dead tree, and what will prevent the woodman from felling me with his ax and making my branches into fagots? It is not yet time for the trees to shed their leaves, and the sun can still dissipate the surrounding fog.

The sight of the dying season made a great impression upon me. I thought that time was fleeting quickly, and that I might die without pressing my ideal to my heart.

On going indoors I made a resolution. As I could not make up my mind to speak I wrote my destiny upon a sheet of paper. It is perhaps ridiculous to write to a person who lives in the same house, whom one can see every day at any hour; but I was not in a state to consider its ridiculousness.

I sealed my letter not without trembling and changing color; then selecting a moment when Theodore had gone out, I placed it on the middle of the table and fled in as much agitation as if I had committed the most disgraceful action possible.

CHAPTER XII

I PROMISED you the rest of my adventures; but really I am so lazy where the writing of letters is concerned, that I must love you as the apple of mine eye and know you to be more curious than Eve or Psyche, to settle down at a table with a

pile of white paper which has to be made black, and an ink bottle deeper than the sea, every drop from which ought to turn into thoughts, or at least something like them, without suddenly resolving to mount and cover at full speed the eighty enormous leagues which separate us to recount to you with my own voice what I am about to write, so that I shall not be frightened by its bulk.

To think that eighty leagues separate me from the person I love best in the whole world! I have a great mind to tear up the letter and saddle my horse. But it is out of the question, for dressed as I am I could not approach you and resume the familiar life we led together when we were naïve and innocent little girls. If ever I resume my skirts it will assuredly be with that object.

I left off, I think, at my departure from the inn where I spent such a droll night and where my virtue was almost shipwrecked on leaving the harbor. We all set off together in the same direction. My companions were loud in their praises of my horse, which was well-bred and fast; that raised me considerably in their estimation, and they added to my own merit that of my steed. They were, however, afraid my mount was too frisky and mettlesome for me. I told them they could allay their fears, and to show them there was no danger I made several curvets, jumped a high hedge, and had a gallop.

The party vainly endeavored to follow me. I drew rein when I had gone far enough, and came back to meet them at full speed; when I was close to them I reined up sharp and stopped short.

From esteem they passed into a state of profound respect for me. They did not suspect that a young student who had recently left the university was so good a horseman. Their discovery had more effect than if they recognized in me all the theological and cardinal virtues. Instead of treating me like a big boy they spoke to me in a tone of obsequious familiarity which gave me great pleasure.

When I doffed my female attire I did not also discard my pride. Being no longer a woman, I wished to be quite a man, and was not content with having the external appearance of one. I decided to attain the success as a cavalier I

could no longer attain as a woman. My greatest anxiety was to know how to manage to have sufficient courage; for courage and skill in bodily exercises are the means by which a man most easily lays the foundation of a reputation. I am not timid for a woman, and I have not that imbecile faint-heartedness found in so many; but that is a long step from the careless and ferocious brutality which is man's glory, and my intention was to become a little bully, a swaggerer, so as to put myself upon a sound footing in society and enjoy all the advantages of my metamorphosis.

Soon I discovered that nothing was easier, and that the recipe was a very simple one.

I will not narrate, as the custom of travelers is, that I covered so many leagues on such a day, that I went to this or that place, that the roast I had at the "White Horse" or the "Iron Cross" was underdone or burnt, that the wine was sour, and will omit all such important details which should be preserved for posterity; for on this occasion posterity must be disappointed. You must resign yourself to remaining ignorant of the number of courses of which my dinner consisted, and also of how I slept during the night. Nor will I give you an exact description of the different countries, the wheat fields, forests, various cultivated lands and hills with hamlets on their slopes which passed before my eyes in succession. That is easy to imagine: take a little land, plant a few trees and shrubs, daub behind them a little bit of gray or pale blue sky, and you will have a very good idea of the changing background to our cavalcade. If in my first letter I entered into a few details of this nature excuse me, and I will not again fall into the same error. As I had never gone out, the slightest thing seemed to me of enormous importance.

One of the horsemen, my bedfellow, was seized with quite a passion for me, and rode by my side all the time.

With the exception that I would not have liked him for a lover, even had he brought me the most beautiful ring in the world, he was not otherwise displeasing to me; he was well-read, and was not lacking in cleverness or good-humor. Only when he spoke of women he did so in a tone of contempt and irony for which I would have gladly torn the two eyes from

his head, the more so as there was, beneath his exaggeration, in what he said many cruel truths, the justice of which my period of disguise had made me recognize.

He invited me in so pressing a way and so often to come and visit with him one of his sisters, a widow now at the end of her mourning, who was living at an old mansion with an aunt, that I could not refuse. I raised a few objections for form's sake, for really it was a matter of no consequence whether I went there or elsewhere, and I could just as well attain my object in that way as in any other; and as he told me that I should annoy him very much if I did not spare him at least a fortnight, I replied that I was agreeable, and the matter was arranged.

At a fork in the road my comrade, pointing to the right, said to me, "That is our way." The rest of the party shook hands and went in the other direction.

After a few hours' journey we reached our destination.

A broad moat which was full of tufts of grass instead of water separated the high road from the park; the facing was of hewn stone, and in the angles stood gigantic artichokes and iron thistles which seemed to have sprung up like natural plants between the disjointed blocks of the wall. A little single-arch bridge crossed the moat and provided access to the gate.

A lofty avenue of elms trimmed in the old style first came into view, and after walking some distance along it we emerged into an open space.

The trees seemed out of date rather than old; they gave the impression that they had wigs and were powdered with white; there had only been left a little tuft of foliage at the summit; all the rest was carefully lopped, so that they looked like enormous plumes planted at intervals.

After crossing the open space, which was covered with fine grass and had been carefully rolled, it was still necessary to pass beneath a curious arch of foliage. A large flower garden in the French style stretched before the château; all the divisions were traced with bushes and holly with the most rigid symmetry; it looked more like a carpet than a garden. Great flowers in ball dress with majestic bearing and serene

faces, like duchesses preparing to dance a minuet, made a slight inclination of the head as we passed. Others, apparently less polite, held themselves stiff and motionless like tapestry dowagers. Shrubs in every possible shape, if we except their natural one, round, square, pointed, triangular, seemed to walk in procession along the great avenue, and lead us by the hand to the bottom of the steps.

A few turrets, half absorbed in more recent building, broke the line of the building. The windows of the middle block all opened on to a balcony ornamented with a balustrade of wrought iron of great richness, and the others were surrounded by stone ledges with carved figures and knots.

Four or five great dogs ran barking and jumping to meet us. They gamboled around the horses and jumped up in front of them; they seemed particularly glad to see my companion's horse, one they had probably often followed and visited in the stable.

At all this noise a servant, half groom, half laborer, appeared, took our steeds by their bridle and led them away. I had seen no person yet, save a little peasant girl, as wild and startled as a doe, who fled at our approach and crouched in a trench, although we called her several times and did all we could to reassure her.

No one appeared at the windows; it seemed as if the château were either uninhabited or else the home of spirits; for not the slightest sound could be heard from without.

We were beginning to ascend the steps, clanking our spurs, for our legs were weary, when we heard from within the sound of doors opening and closing as if some one was hastening to meet us.

A young woman appeared upon the top of the steps, traversed the space which separated her from my companion at a bound, and fell upon his neck. He kissed her most affectionately, and putting his arm around her waist, almost lifted her up and carried her like that to the top.

"Do you know you are very loving and gallant for a brother, Alcibiades? It is not quite unnecessary for me to tell you that he is my brother, is it, sir?" the young woman said, turning to me.

My reply was to the effect that it was possible to be mistaken, and that it was to some extent a misfortune to be her brother and thus be excluded from the number of her lovers; that I, personally, in his place should become at the same time the happiest and most unhappy knight on earth. This made her smile sweetly.

While talking like this we entered a low hall, the walls of which were decorated with a Flemish tapestry.

"Alcibiades, I am going to tell your aunt of your arrival."

"Oh, that is not a very urgent matter, sister; let us sit down first and have a chat. Allow me to present to you a gentleman, Theodore de Sérannes, who will stay here a little while. I have no need to ask you to give him a hearty welcome; he is his own recommendation" (I am repeating his words; do not impetuously accuse me of fatuity).

The beauty made a slight motion of the head as if to assent, and we talked of other things.

While joining in the conversation I looked at her carefully and examined her more attentively than I had done before.

She was about twenty-three or four, and her mourning suited her to perfection; to tell the truth, she did not seem at all sorrowful or downcast. I do not know whether she had shed many tears for her departed spouse; if she had done so there was no sign of them, and the pretty cambric handkerchief she held in her hand was as dry as possible.

Her eyes were not red, on the contrary they were the most clear and brilliant in the world, and it was waste of time to look upon her cheeks for the groove down which the tears had flowed; the only things visible there were two little dimples fashioned by her habit of smiling, and for a widow it must be admitted that one could very frequently see her teeth; it certainly was not a disagreeable sight, for they were pretty and even. I esteemed her first of all for not feeling herself obliged, because her husband had died, to darken her eyes and make her nose violet. I also looked upon it as good taste for her not to assume some little sorrowful mannerism, and to speak naturally in her cheery and sonorous voice, without drawling her words or intersecting her phrases by virtuous sighs.

All that appeared to me to be in very good taste. I looked upon her as a clever woman, and I was quite correct in my estimate.

She was well made, with aristocratic feet and hands; her black dress was arranged as coquettishly as possible, and so gayly that the mournfulness of the color completely disappeared, and she might have gone to a ball as she was without appearing out of place. If ever I marry and am left a widow I shall ask her for a pattern of her dress, for it suited her to perfection.

After a chat we went upstairs to see the aunt.

We found her sitting in a large easy-chair, with her feet upon a footstool, and by her side an old dog, sullen and blind, which lifted his black head at our approach and received us with an unfriendly growl.

I have never gazed upon an old woman without a feeling of horror. My mother died quite young; without a doubt if I had seen her slowly age and her features gradually lose their shape by imperceptible stages, I should have become accustomed to the change. In my youth I was surrounded by young and laughing faces only, so that I retained an unbearable antipathy for old folk. Therefore I shuddered when the beautiful widow touched with her pure red lips the dowager's yellow forehead.

Still the old lady had retained a few simple and majestic traces of her former beauty, which prevented her from falling into that ugliness of the baked-apple order, which is the fate of women who have only been pretty or fresh colored. Her eyes, though terminating in wrinkles at their corners and covered by large, loose lids, had retained a few sparks of their former fire, and it was obvious that in the reign of another king they had launched dazzling and passionate glances. Her small, slender nose, slightly arched like the beak of a bird of prey, gave to her profile an appearance of severe grandeur, which tempered the indulgent smile of her lips, still carmine tinted according to the fashion of the last century.

Her costume was old-fashioned without being ridiculous, and harmonized perfectly with her face. She had as a head-

dress a mob cap with a little lace; her long, slender hands, which seemed once to have been very beautiful, were in mittens, while a dark dress embroidered with flowers, a black shawl, and an apron completed her attire.

Old ladies should always dress like that, and thus respect their approaching death by not adorning themselves with feathers, garlands of flowers, ribbons of tender colors, and the thousand trinkets which only suit extreme youth. It is in vain for them to make advances to life, for life is not willing.

The old lady received us with that ease and exquisite politeness which is the privilege of members of the old nobility, and grows rarer day by day like so many other secrets, and spoke in a voice which, although broken and tremulous, was still very sweet.

I seemed to please her greatly, and she looked at me long and attentively with a very tender expression. A tear formed in the corner of her eye and trickled slowly down one of her wrinkles till it disappeared. She begged me to excuse her and told me that I was very much like her son who had been killed in battle.

All the time I stayed at the château, because of this likeness, real or imaginary, I was treated by the old lady with extraordinary and maternal kindness. I found this more charming than I believed possible, for the greatest kindness as a rule aged persons can do me is to never speak and to depart when I arrive.

I shall not tell you in detail and day by day what I did at R. If I have been a little prolix at the beginning, and have sketched with some care the two or three persons, it is because strange though quite natural things have happened to me there, events which I ought to have anticipated when I assumed male attire.

My natural thoughtlessness led me into an imprudence which I bitterly repent, for it has brought a trouble to a good and beautiful soul which I cannot allay without making known who I am and seriously compromising myself.

To play the part of a man perfectly and amuse myself, I found nothing better to do than to make love to my friend's sister. It seemed to me very funny to go down on all fours

when she dropped her glove and restore it to her with a pronounced obeisance, to lean over the back of her chair with a languorous air and to pour into her ear a thousand and one of the most charming madrigals. When she wished to go from one room to the other I gracefully offered her my arm; if she mounted her horse I held the stirrup; and when walking I was always at her side. In the evening I read to her or sang with her; in short I played the part of a suitor with scrupulous exactness.

I imitated all the gestures I had seen lovers make, much to my own amusement, for alone in my chamber I laughed like a madman when I thought of all the impertinences I had uttered in the most serious tone in the world.

Alcibiades and the old Marquis appeared to view the intimacy with pleasure and left us very often together. I sometimes regretted I was not really a man, to profit better by the opportunity; if I had been my suit would have been successful, for the charming widow seemed to have entirely forgotten her late husband, or else if she remembered him she would have gladly been unfaithful to his memory.

After beginning in this fashion I could scarcely draw back with honor, and it was very difficult to conduct a retreat with arms and baggage. I could, however, refrain from overstepping a certain mark and restrict my amiability to words alone. I hoped in this way to reach the end of the month I was to spend at R. and go away promising to return. I thought that on my departure the beauty would console herself, and not seeing me again would soon forget me.

But in my sport I had awakened a serious passion, for matters turned out differently, and that brings to mind the well-known truism that it is never advisable to play with fire or love.

Before seeing me Rosette knew nothing of love. Married very young to a man much older than herself, she only had a sort of filial affection for him; without a doubt she had been courted, but, extraordinary though it may seem, she had never had a lover; either the gallants who had made love to her were not very seductive, or more likely her hour had not yet come. The country suitors were not to her liking, and

her virtue had not been sorely tried to resist their assaults. Besides, her natural gayety and humor were a sufficient defence against love, that soft passion which has such a hold upon dreamers and the sorrowful; the idea her old Tithonus had been able to give her of love must have been such a poor one that she was not greatly tempted to try again, and she enjoyed the pleasure of being a widow at so early an age and of still having so many years of beauty before her.

But at my arrival all that changed. I at first thought that if I had maintained with her a cold and exact politeness she would not have paid any attention to me; but I was obliged to admit that I was mistaken.

Rosette's destiny is to love only once in her life, an impossible love; she must realize it and she will do so.

I have been loved, Graciosa! It is a sweet thing, though it is only by a woman, and in an irregular affection like that there is something painful which is not found in another. Oh, it is a very sweet thing! When one wakes in the night, and sits up to say, "Some one is thinking or dreaming of me; some one is concerned in my life; a movement of my eyes or mouth brings joy or sorrow to another creature; a word I have dropped by chance is gathered with care, commented upon, and examined for hours together; I am the star by which an anxious lover steers; my eyes are a sky, my mouth a paradise more desired than the real one; were I to die, a soft rain of tears would warm my ashes, my grave would be more adorned with flowers than a bridal; if I were in danger some one would rush between the point of the sword and my breast in sacrifice for me!" It is beautiful; and I do not know anything one can desire more in the world.

This thought gave me a pleasure with which I reproached myself, for after all I had nothing to give, and I was in the position of the poor person accepting presents from a rich and generous friend, without the hope of ever being able to make any return. It charmed me to be so adored, and at times I accepted the situation with strange complaisance. Through hearing every one call me "Sir" and treat me as if I were a man, I insensibly forgot I was a woman; my dis-

guise seemed to me my natural attire, and I did not recollect wearing any other.

Many men are more womanly than I am. I have only a woman's throat, a few curved lines, and delicate hands; the skirt is around my thighs, not in my mind. It often happens that the sex of the soul is not that of the body, and it is a contradiction which cannot fail to produce great disorder. If, for example, I had never taken my apparently foolish but in reality very wise resolution to renounce the attire of a sex which is only materially mine by chance, I should have been very unhappy. I love horses, fencing, violent exercises, and I am delighted to run and climb like a boy; it bores me to sit still with my feet close together and my elbows at my sides, to modestly drop my eyes, to talk in a soft, flute-like, and honeyed voice, and to pass a bit of cotton ten million times through the holes in a piece of cloth; I do not care for obedience the least bit in the world, and the word I use most often is "I want." Beneath my smooth forehead and silky hair strong and virile thoughts are at work; all the precious trifles which usually seduce women have ever had but little charm for me, and, like Achilles when disguised as a girl, I would willingly discard the mirror for a sword. The only thing about women which pleases me is their beauty; in spite of its inconvenient results, I would not readily renounce my form, badly though it is suited to the mind it envelops.

There was something new and piquant in an intrigue of the sort, and I should have been greatly amused by it, if it had not been taken seriously by poor Rosette. She set herself to love me with admirable *naïveté* and conscientiousness, and all the strength of her good and beautiful soul, with the love men do not understand and have only a dim idea, delicately and ardently, just as I should desire to be loved, and as I should love if I met the reality of my dream. What a beautiful lost treasure; what white, transparent pearls, such as the divers could never bring up from the depths of the ocean! What fragrant breaths, what sweet sighs were dispersed in the air, which might have been gathered by pure and loving lips!

This love might have made a young man so happy! So

many unhappy men, handsome, charming, and wealthy, full of courage and intellect, have vainly worshiped on bended knees insensible and dejected idols! So many good and tender souls have in despair thrown themselves into the arms of courage and intellect, have vainly worshiped on bended sepulchers, though they would have been saved from debauchery and death by a sincere love!

What a strange thing is human destiny! What a great jester is chance!

That for which so many others had ardently longed came to me, to the person who did not and could not desire it. A capricious young girl has a fancy to travel dressed as a man to find out a little about her future lovers; she sleeps at an inn with a worthy brother who takes her to his sister, and the latter has nothing better to do than to fall in love like a cat or a dove. It is quite evident that if I had been a young man, and her love had been of advantage to me, it would have been quite different and the lady would have had a horror of me. Fortune is very fond of giving slippers to those who have wooden legs, and gloves to those who are without hands; the legacy which would have enabled a person to live in comfort usually comes to them on the day of their death.

I went sometimes, though not as often as she would have liked, to see Rosette in her chamber; although she usually received after she was up, that rule was waived in my favor. Many other favors would also have been granted me, had I wished; but the most beautiful girl can only give what she has, and how could I tell poor Rosette.

She gave me her little hand to kiss; I confess I did not kiss it without some pleasure, for it was very soft, white, exquisitely perfumed, and made tender by its slight moisture; I felt it tremble and contract under my lips, the pressure of which I maliciously prolonged. Then Rosette, with a suppliant air, turned to me her almond eyes, full of passion and inundated with a humid and transparent light, before dropping back upon the pillow her pretty head, which she had slightly raised to receive me. I saw beneath the clothes her throat heave and a tremor run through the whole of her body. Truly any one who was in a position to dare might

have ventured far, and would certainly have met no opposition to his temerity, and then several chapters of the story would have had to omitted.

I stayed there for an hour or two with her, without letting go her hand, which was upon the coverlet; we had charming and never-ending talks, for although Rosette was greatly concerned with her love, she believed herself too certain of success not to retain almost all her liberty and gayety of mind. From time to time her passion threw upon her gayety a transparent veil of sweet melancholy which rendered her still more piquant.

Actually, it would have been an unheard-of thing for a young fellow, as I appeared to be, not to consider himself very fortunate and take advantage of his good fortune to the uttermost. Rosette was not used to harsh treatment and being unaware of my position, she reckoned upon the effect of her own charms and my youth, even though my love was not hers.

But as this situation began to be prolonged beyond its natural limits she became uneasy, and I had a difficulty, even with an increase of my flattering phrases and beautiful protestations, to restore her former confidence. Two things astonished her in me, and she noticed in my conduct contradictions she could not reconcile—the warmth of my words and the coldness of my actions.

You know better than any one, my dear Graciosa, that my friendship has all the characteristics of a passion; it is sudden, ardent, and exclusive, even to jealousy, and I had for Rosette a friendship almost equal to my friendship for you. It was possible to be mistaken. Rosette was all the more deceived because the clothes I wore hardly allowed her to have any other idea.

As I have not yet loved a man, the excess of my affection is to some extent poured out in my friendship with young girls and women; I put into it the same zeal and exaltation I display in everything I undertake, for it is impossible for me to be moderate in anything, especially when it concerns the heart. There are in my eyes two classes of people, those I love and those I hate; other persons are to me as if they never existed, and I would ride my horse over them as if they were

a high road; they do not differ in my mind from paths and rails.

I am naturally expansive, and I have most caressing ways. Sometimes, forgetting the import such demonstrations had, while walking with Rosette I passed my arm around her body, as I used to do when you and I walked together along the lonely walk at the end of my uncle's garden; or else, leaning over the back of her chair as she was engaged upon her embroidery, I rolled around my fingers the downy hair upon her round, plump neck, or polished with the back of my hand the beautiful tresses fastened by her comb and added to their luster, or else I brought into play some other of the pretty ways with which you know it is usual for me to favor my dear friends.

She took care not to attribute these caresses to simple friendship. Friendship, as it is usually understood, does not go so far; but seeing I went no further she was inwardly surprised and did not know what to think; she came to the conclusion that it was timidity on my part, arising from my extreme youth and inexperience in love affairs, and that she must encourage me by all sorts of advances and kindness.

Consequently she took care to give me plenty of opportunities for *tête-à-têtes* in suitable places in order to embolden me by their solitude, freedom from noise and interruption; she made me take several walks in the great woods, to try whether the voluptuous reverie and amorous desires inspired in tender souls by the leafy and inviting shade of the forest could not be turned to her advantage.

One day, after making me wander for a long while through a picturesque park which extended far behind the château, and which except the part near the house was quite strange to me, she led me by a little winding path bordered with elders and nut trees to a rustic house, a sort of charcoal-burner's hut, built of round pieces of wood placed crossways, with a thatched roof, and a door roughly made of five or six bits of wood roughhewn, the crevices of which were filled with moss and wild plants; at the side, between the green roots of the mighty ashes with their silver bark, and black patches here and there, a large spring flowed and a few steps

further on fell down two marble steps into a pool full of emerald-green watercress. At the spots which were free from foliage a fine sand, white as snow, was visible; this water was as transparent as crystal and cold as ice; springing from the earth, and never being in contact with the tiniest ray of sunlight in these impenetrable shades, there was no opportunity for it to be stirred up or warmed. In spite of their crudity I love spring waters, and seeing this one was so limpid, I could not resist a desire to drink; I leant down, and several times drank from the hollow of my hand, having no other vessel at my disposal.

Rosette also expressed a desire to drink to quench her thirst, and begged me to procure her a few drops, not daring, so she said, to lean down far enough to reach the water herself. I plunged my two hands, clasped together as closely as possible, into the clear stream, lifted them like a cup to Rosette's lips, and held them there till she had exhausted the water they held, which did not take long, for there was but little after it had trickled through my fingers, tightly though they were clasped; we made a pretty group, and would that a sculptor had been present to make a sketch.

When she had nearly finished, having my hand near her lips, she could not help kissing it, in such a way, however, that I might think it was an inhalation to extract the last drop of water from my palms; but I was not deceived, and the charming blush which suddenly spread over her face betrayed her.

She took my arm again and we set off towards the hut. The beauty walked as close to me as possible, and leant over as we talked, so that her throat rested entirely upon my sleeve: an extremely clever position it was for her to assume, and one capable of disturbing many others besides myself; I could perfectly feel her firm and pure throat and gentle warmth; besides I could notice a hurried undulation which, whether real or affected, was none the less flattering and attractive.

We arrived in this fashion at the door of the hut, which I pushed open with my foot. I did not certainly expect the sight which presented itself to my eyes. I thought the hut

would be carpeted with rushes, having the ground for its floor and a few stools to rest upon. Not at all.

It was a boudoir, furnished with every imaginable elegance. The bottom of the doors and the mirrors represented the most gallant scenes from the metamorphoses of Ovid: Salmacis and Hermaphrodite, Venus and Adonis, Apollo and Daphne, and other love scenes from ancient mythology; the piers were made of roses, most delicately carved, and little marguerites, only the hearts of which were gilded and the leaves silvered. A silver edging bordered all the furniture and relieved a color scheme of the softest blue it is possible to imagine, and at the same time one marvelously adapted to make the whiteness and glory of the skin stand out; a thousand charming curiosities loaded the mantelshelf, the tables and whatnots, and there was a regal luxury in the long chairs and sofas which was sufficient evidence that this retreat was not destined for austere occupations, and that one would not be uncomfortable there.

A beautiful marble clock standing upon a richly encrusted pedestal faced a large Venetian mirror, in which it was reflected with strange and brilliant effect. Besides it had stopped, as if the marking of the hours was a superfluity in a place destined to forget them.

I told Rosette that this refined luxury delighted me, that I considered it very good taste to conceal the greatest refinement under an appearance of simplicity, and that I approved very strongly of a woman wearing embroidered skirts and lace-trimmed chemises beneath a simple linen overall; it was a delicate attention to the lover she had or would have for which he could not be too grateful, for surely it was better to put a diamond in a nut than a nut in a golden box.

Rosette, to prove to me that she was of the same opinion, raised her skirt a little, and showed me the border of an underskirt richly embroidered with flowers and foliage; it only rested with myself then to have been admitted into the secrets of her most magnificent wear; but I did not ask to see if the splendour of the chemise was equal to that of the skirt, though it is probable that its luxuriousness was no less. Rosette let fall her skirt, surprised at my indifference. Still

this exhibition had served to display the beginning of a perfectly turned calf and to give the utmost promise for the upper part. The leg she stretched out the better to display her underskirt was really of miraculous fineness and gracefulness in its pearl-gray silk stocking, tight and well-fitting, and the little heeled slipper ornamented with a bow at the toe was like a real Cinderella's shoe. I paid her the most sincere compliments, and I told her that I did not know a prettier leg or smaller foot, and that I did not think it possible for any to be more shapely. To this she replied with a frankness and ingenuousness quite charming and clever:

"Quite true."

Then she went to a panel in the wall, and took out a flask or two of liqueurs and a few plates of biscuits and sweets, placed them all upon a little table, and sat down by me upon a little easy chair, so narrow that in order not to be too crowded I was obliged to put my arm round her waist. As she had two hands free, and I only had my left of any use to me, she poured out the wine and helped me to biscuits; soon noticing that I was rather clumsy, she said, "Come, never mind; I will feed you, dear child, as you cannot feed yourself." Then she raised the food to my mouth, and forced me to swallow it more quickly than I liked by pushing it in with her pretty fingers, absolutely in the way birds are fed when they are being crammed, and that made her laugh very much. I could hardly help returning to her fingers the kiss she had given just before to the palm of my hand, and as if to prevent me, but really to furnish me with an opportunity to better place my kiss, she patted my mouth two or three times with the back of her hand. We had a glass or two of Canary wine, not much certainly, but enough to excite two women only used to water. Rosette leant back upon my arm very lovingly. She had taken off her cloak, and I could see the commencement of the throat, which was tense and still in her bent position: its tint was ravishingly delicate and transparent; its shape was slender and at the same time marvelously solid. I contemplated her for some time with indefinable emotion and pleasure, and the thought came into my mind that men were more favored than we were in their

love affairs, that we gave them possession of the most charming treasures, and they had nothing like them to offer us. What pleasure there must be in traversing with the lips such fine polished skin and such rounded contours, which seem to come to meet the kiss and provoke it! This satiny flesh, these undulating lines running one into the other, the hair so silky and soft to the touch; what inexhaustible incentives they are for delicate pleasures which men cannot offer us! Our caresses can hardly be but passive, and yet there is more pleasure in giving than in receiving.

Most certainly I should not have made such remarks a year ago, and I could have looked at all the throats and shoulders in the world without interest as to whether they were of good or bad shape; but since I have discarded the attire of my sex and live with young men, a sentiment quite unknown has developed in me—the sentiment of beauty. Women are usually deprived of it. I know not why, for at first they seem better judges of it than men; but though there are some who possess it, yet the knowledge of oneself is the most difficult of all knowledge, and it is therefore not surprising they do not understand it. Usually if a woman thinks another woman very pretty one may be sure the latter is very ugly, and no man will notice her. In return, all women whose beauty and grace are noted by the men are unanimously considered abominable and affected by the skirted brigade; they raise endless comment. If I were what I appear to be, I would take no other guide in my choice, and woman's disapprobation would be a sufficient certificate of beauty for me.

Now I love and know beauty; the clothes I wear separate me from my sex and take away all rivalry; I am even in a better position to judge than any one else. I am no longer a woman, but not yet a man, and desire will never blind me into taking lay figures for idols; I see coldly and without prejudice either for or against, and my position is as perfectly disinterested a one as possible.

The length and fineness of the lashes, the transparence of the temples, the modeling of the ear, the tone and quality of the hair, the well-bred appearance of the feet and hands, the coupling more or less loosely of the legs and wrists, a thou-

sand things which I did not notice, and which constitute real beauty and prove good breeding, guide me in my appreciation and hardly admit of a mistake. I believe any man might accept with their eyes shut a woman of whom I had said, "Really, she is not bad."

Consequently I am a much better judge of pictures than formerly, and although I have only a very superficial smattering of art, it would be difficult to make me pass a bad work as a good one; I find a strange and profound charm in this study, for, as in everything else, moral or physical beauty requires to be studied, and cannot be grasped at once.

But to return to Rosette; from this subject to her the transition is not a difficult one, and they are two ideas which invite companionship.

As I have said, the beauty was leaning back upon my arm with her head against my shoulder; emotion tinted her beautiful cheeks a delicate rose color, which admirably set off the deep black of a coquettishly placed beauty spot; her teeth gleamed through her smile like raindrops in the heart of a poppy, and her half-lowered lashes still further increased the humid brilliancy of her great eyes; a ray of sunlight produced a thousand gleams upon her silky hair, several curls of which had escaped and hung in repentance upon her plump, round neck, setting off its whiteness; a few little tresses more unruly than the others having become detached from the rest, were twisted in capricious spirals, and gilded by strange reflections, which in the light assumed all the colors of the prism; these threads of gold were like the halos which in the old pictures surround the heads of virgins. We were both silent, and I amused myself by following, beneath the pearly transparence of her temples, her little azure veins, and the tapering of the down at the extremity of her brows.

The beauty seemed to retire within herself and cradle herself in dreams of infinite pleasure; her arms hung down at her sides as undulating and soft as loose sashes; her head leant further and further backward, as if the muscles which sustained it had been cut or were too weak to support it. She had withdrawn her two little feet beneath her skirt, and had succeeded in entirely retiring into the corner of the easy chair

I occupied, so that although it was very narrow there was an empty space on the other side.

Her yielding and supple body was modeled upon mine like wax, and took its external contour with the greatest possible exactness; water could not have filled the curves more closely. Thus leaning against my side, she was like the double outline which painters add to their subjects on the shadow side, to make them look fatter and better fed. Only an amorous woman could have such undulations and enlacements. In comparison ivy was far behind her.

The gentle warmth of her body penetrated through her clothing and my own; a thousand magnetic streams vibrated around her; her entire life seemed to have passed into me and to have left her completely. Moment by moment she languished, expired, and bent more and more. A light perspiration stood upon her shining forehead; her eyes moistened, and two or three times she made a movement as if to raise her hands to hide them; but halfway her weary arms fell back upon her knees, and she did not succeed; a large tear overflowed from her eyes and trickled down her burning cheeks, where it was soon absorbed.

My position became very embarrassing and passably ridiculous; I felt that I must appear enormously stupid and that annoyed me extremely, although I had no power to alter it. Enterprise was forbidden me, and certainly that was the only method which would please her now. I was too sure of not receiving any resistance to run the risk, and really I did not know of what wood to make an arrow. The use of gallant phrases and madrigals was satisfactory in the beginning, but nothing would appear more insipid at this stage; to get up and go out would have been the greatest rudeness; and besides, I am not sure that Rosette would not have played the part of Potiphar's wife, and have detained me by the corner of my cloak. I should have had no virtuous motive in resisting her; and then, to my shame, I must admit that this scene, though equivocal in its character to me, was not without a certain charm which restrained me longer than necessary; my ardent love was kindled at her flame, and I was really angry at my unfortunate position; I even desired to be a man as

effectively as I appeared, to return her love, and I regretted very much that Rosette was mistaken. My breathing quickened, I felt the blushes mount to my face, and I was scarcely less troubled than my poor sweetheart. The idea of the similarity of our sexes gradually disappeared, leaving only a vague sense of pleasure; my glances were veiled, my lips trembled, and if Rosette had been a cavalier, instead of being what she was, how happy should I have been.

In the end, being unable to contain herself, she got up quickly, making a sort of spasmodic movement, and began to rapidly pace the room; then she stopped in front of the mirror and rearranged a few strands of her hair. During this time I cut a poor figure, and I hardly knew what demeanor to assume.

She stopped in front of me and seemed to reflect.

She thought that a mad timidity alone restrained me, and that I was more of a schoolboy than she had at first believed. Excited by her love, she wished to make a supreme effort, and risk the loss of the part to gain the whole.

She came to me and quicker than lightning sat down upon my knees, passed her arms around my neck, clasped her hands behind my head, and her mouth seized mine in a furious embrace; I felt her bare throat in revolt against my breast, and her entwined fingers twitched in my hair. A tremor ran through the whole of my body.

Rosette did not leave my mouth; her lips enveloped my lips, her teeth touched my teeth, our breaths were intermingled. I drew back for an instant, and turned my head two or three times to avoid her kisses; but an invincible attraction made me turn back, and I returned them to her almost as ardently as I had received them. I hardly know what would have happened if a loud barking had not sounded outside the door with a noise of scratching feet. The door gave way and a beautiful white greyhound entered the hut, yelping and jumping.

Rosette got up quickly and ran to the end of the room. The beautiful white greyhound leapt with joy around her and tried to reach her hands to lick them; she was so troubled

that she had great difficulty in readjusting her cloak on her shoulders.

This greyhound was the favorite dog of her brother Alcibiades; the animal never left him, and when the dog appeared it was certain that the master was not far away; that was the reason poor Rosette was so frightened.

A moment later Alcibiades himself, booted and spurred, came in whip in hand. "Ah, here you are then," he said. "I have been looking for you for more than an hour, and I should never have found you if my good dog Smug had not discovered your hiding-place." He cast a half-serious, half-joking glance at his sister, which made her blush up to the white of her eyes. "You had apparently some very thorny subjects to discuss to retire to such profound solitude? You doubtless were talking of theology and the double nature of the soul?"

"Oh, no! Our occupation was hardly as sublime as that; we were eating sweets and talking fashions, that is all."

"I don't think so. You seemed to me to be profoundly buried in some sentimental dissertation; but to distract you after your vaporous conversation, I think it would be a good idea for you to take a turn on horseback with me. I have a new mare I want to try. You shall ride her too, Theodore, and we will see what she is like."

We all three went out together, Alcibiades giving me his arm, while I gave mine to Rosette. The expressions on our faces were strangely varied: Alcibiades had a pensive look, I was quite at my ease, while Rosette seemed exceedingly annoyed.

Alcibiades had arrived just at the right time for me, but very inopportunately for Rosette, who lost, or thought she had done so, by it, the reward of her attacks and ingenious tactics. She had to begin again; had he been a quarter of an hour later, I am sure I do not know what the upshot of this adventure would have been; I see no possible ending. Perhaps it would have been better if Alcibiades had not intervened precisely at the crucial moment; the situation must have reached a climax in one way or another. During this scene I was two or three times on the point of confessing to Rosette

who I was; but the fear of being taken for an adventuress and of seeing my secret divulged kept back from my lips the words which they were ready to utter.

Such a state of things could not last. My departure was the only way of cutting short this purposeless intrigue, so at dinner I announced that I was leaving the following day. Rosette, who was sitting by my side, nearly fainted on hearing my statement and dropped her glass. Pallor suddenly overspread her beautiful face; she cast me a sorrowful glance, full of reproach, which made me as agitated and disturbed as she was herself.

The aunt raised her wrinkled hands in a movement of pained surprise, and in her shrill and quavering voice, which now trembled more than usual, said, "Surely, my dear Theodore, you are not going to leave us like that? It is not kind of you; yesterday you showed not the slightest inclination to go. The post has not come, so you have received no letters, and have no excuse. You promised us another fortnight and now you are going to disappoint us; it is not right of you to do so; you cannot go back on your word. See what a face Rosette is making at you, and how glad she will be for you to stay. I warn you that I desire it as much as she does, and that I shall pull just as long a face, and at sixty-eight that is a great deal more terrible than at twenty-three. See to what you are voluntarily exposing yourself: to the anger of the aunt and niece, and all for some caprice which has suddenly seized you between the cheese and the dessert."

Alcibiades swore, giving the table a heavy blow with his fist, that he would barricade the gates of the château and hamstring my horse rather than let me go.

Rosette threw me another glance so sad and supplicating that it would have needed the ferocity of a famished tiger, one without food for a week, not to have been touched. I did not resist, and although it considerably annoyed me to do so, I gave a solemn promise to stay. Dear Rosette would gladly have clung to my neck and kissed me for my kindness; Alcibiades grasped my fingers in his huge hand and shook my arm so violently that he nearly dislocated my shoulder, bent my rings oval, and cut my fingers rather deeply.

Still Rosette did not quite recover her spirits; the idea that I could go away and that I desired to do so, an idea that had not before been brought clearly to her mind, threw her into a profound reverie. The color the news of my departure had chased from her cheeks did not come back as quickly as formerly; she was still pale of face, with an anxious feeling in her heart. My conduct towards her surprised her more and more. After the pronounced advances she had made me, she did not understand the motives which led me to exercise so much restraint in my relations with her. Her desire was, before my departure, to lead me into a definite engagement, not doubting that after that it would be easy to retain me as long as she wished.

In that she was right, and had I not been a woman her calculation would have been correct, for although the satiety of pleasure and the disgust which usually follows it is talked of, any man whose heart is in the right place, and who is not miserably and incurably blasé, feels his love grow with his happiness, and very often the best way for a woman to keep a lover who is ready to break loose is to give herself to him with entire abandon.

Rosette had the intention of leading me into something definite before my departure. Knowing how difficult it is later on to resume a liaison at the point where it is broken off, and besides never being sure of meeting me again under such favorable circumstances, she neglected no opportunity which arose of putting me in a position to speak clearly and to quit the evasive style in which I took refuge. As I had on my side the formal and determined intention to avoid any encounter like that in the rustic pavilion, and still could not without attracting ridicule display too much coolness to Rosette and introduce childish prudery into our relations, I hardly knew what attitude to adopt, and I tried to always manage to have a third person in our company. Rosette, on the contrary, tried all she could to be alone with me, and she often enough succeeded, the château being some distance from the town and not much frequented by the gentry of the neighborhood. This secret resistance saddened and surprised her; occasionally there arose in her mind doubts and hesi-

tancy as to the power of her charms, and seeing how little she was loved, she was not at times far off the belief that she was ugly. Then she doubled her attentions and coquetry, and although her mourning did not allow her to employ the aids of the toilette to their fullest extent, she still succeeded in adorning herself and varying her dress so that every day she was two or three times more charming than on the previous day, and that is not saying a little. She tried everything. She was jolly, melancholy, tender, passionate, obliging, coquettish, and even simpering; she assumed one after another all those masks which suit women so well, that it is impossible to decide whether they are masks or real faces; she arrayed herself in eight or ten contrasted individualities in succession to see which would please me and to fix upon that one. In herself alone she provided me with a complete seraglio, and all I had to do was to throw the handkerchief; but on her part nothing succeeded.

The lack of success of all these stratagems caused her to fall into a profound stupor. Days passed and she made no progress. She was visibly affected by it; an expression of uneasy sadness had taken the place of the fresh smile upon her lips; the corners of her mouth, which had been so gayly curved, had drooped appreciably, and formed a firm and serious line; a few little veins became more marked in her tender eyes; her cheeks, formerly so peachlike had only retained their imperceptible bloom. Often from my window I saw her cross the garden in her morning wrapper; she walked hardly raising her feet, as if she slid, with her two arms crossed upon her breast, her head bowed, more bent than a willow bough hanging in the water, and with an undulating and heavy motion like that of drapery which was too long and trailed upon the ground. At these times she looked like one of those ancient lovers, a victim of Venus's rage whom the pitiless goddess had furiously attacked. I could picture to myself Psyche like that after she had lost Cupid.

The days when she did not force herself to overcome my coolness and hesitation her love had a simple and primitive charm which fascinated me; then hers was a silent and trusting abandonment, a chaste facility for caresses, and an

inexhaustible abundance and plenitude of heart, in fact all the treasures of a beautiful nature bestowed without reserve. She was free from the pettiness and meanness so common in even the best of women; she did not attempt any disguise, but allowed me to see the extent of her love. Her self-respect did not revolt for an instant because I did not respond to her advances, for pride leaves the heart the day love enters, and if ever any one were truly loved it was I. She suffered, but without complaint or bitterness, and she only attributed the lack of success of her efforts to herself. Yet her pallor increased every day, for the lilies and roses had joined battle upon her cheeks, and the roses had been decisively routed; it pained me to see this, but I was as powerless as any one else. The more gently and affectionately I spoke to her, the more caressing were my ways, the deeper I buried the barbed arrow of impossible love in her heart. In consoling her to-day I prepared for her a much more terrible despair in the future: my remedies poisoned her wound while seeming to stanch it. I repented to some extent of all the agreeable things I had said, and I should have liked, because of my extreme friendship for her, to discover a way to make her hate me.

I tried two or three times to speak unkindly to her, but I quickly returned to the madrigal, for I was less afraid of her smile than her tears. On these occasions, although the loyalty of the intention fully absolved me in my conscience, I was more touched than I need have been, and I experienced something not far removed from remorse. A tear can hardly be dried any other way but by a kiss, and one cannot with decency leave such a task to a handkerchief, though it be of the finest cambric in the world; I undid what I had done, the tear was quickly forgotten, more quickly than the kiss, and my embarrassment was afterwards doubled.

Rosette, who sees that I am going to escape her, clings obstinately and sadly to the remnants of her hope, and my position is becoming more and more complicated. The strange sensation I experienced in the little hut, and the inconceivable agitation into which I was thrown by the ardor of the caresses of my beautiful sweetheart, have been several times renewed, though with less violence; and often when

sitting near Rosette hand in hand, and listening to her cooing voice, I imagine that I am a man, as she believes me to be, and that if I do not respond to her love it is pure cruelty on my part.

One evening, by some accident, I was alone in the green room with the old lady; she had in her hand a piece of tapestry, for in spite of being sixty-eight she was never idle, wishing, so she said, to finish before her death a piece of work she had begun and labored upon for a very long time. Feeling a little tired, she put down her work and leant back in her armchair. She looked at me very attentively and her gray eyes sparkled through her spectacles with strange vivacity; she passed two or three times her dry hand over her wrinkled forehead and appeared to be thinking deeply. The recollection of the past and her regrets gave her face an expression of melancholy affection. I was silent for fear of disturbing her thoughts, and the silence lasted for some moments; at last she broke it.

"They are Henry's eyes, my dear Henry's; the same humid and brilliant glance, the same carriage of the head, the same gentle though proud face; you are just like him. You cannot imagine how great the likeness is, Theodore; when I look at you, I cannot believe that Henry is dead; I think he can only have been on a long journey and returned at last. You have caused me great pleasure and great pain, Theodore; pleasure in recalling to my mind my poor Henry, pain in showing me how great my loss has been; sometimes I have taken you for his spirit. I cannot reconcile myself to the idea that you are going to leave us. It seems to me that I am again losing my dear Henry."

I told her that if it were really possible for me to stay longer I would do so with pleasure, but that my stay had already extended beyond its proper limits; that besides I proposed to return, and the château would leave me with memories too agreeable to be quickly forgotten.

"However angry I may be at your departure, Theodore," she went on, following out her idea, "there is some one who will be more so. You understand my meaning. I do not know what we shall do with Rosette after you have gone. Now this

old château is very melancholy. Alcibiades is always engaged in some kind of sport, and for a young woman the society of a poor invalid like me is not very cheerful."

"If any one ought to regret, it is not you, madam, nor Rosette, but myself; you lose little, I much; you will easily find more charming society than mine, but it is more than doubtful if I can ever replace Rosette's and yours."

"I do not desire to quarrel with your modesty, my dear sir, but I know what I know, and I am speaking from my knowledge. It is probable that we shall not see Madam Rosette in a good temper for a long time, for it is you now who cause the rain and the fine weather upon her cheeks. Her period of mourning is over, and it will be very unpleasant for her to take off her gayety with her last black garment; that would be a very bad example and quite contrary to the ordinary rule. Now you can prevent that without much trouble, and you must do so," the old lady said, laying great stress on the last few words.

"Certainly I will do my best so that your niece may retain her gayety, since you credit me with such influence over her. Still, I hardly see how I am to do it."

"Oh, you hardly see! What use are your beautiful eyes? I did not know you were so shortsighted. Rosette is free, she has an income of eighty thousand francs in her own right, and that would make women twice as ugly as she is very pretty. You are young, well made, and, I believe, unmarried; it seems to me to be the simplest thing in the world, unless you have an insupportable horror of Rosette, and that is hard to believe."

"That is not, and cannot be; for her soul is equal to her body, and she is one of those women who could be ugly without its being noticeable or thought desirable for them to be otherwise."

"She could be ugly with impunity and she is charming; that is a double reason. I do not doubt your word, but she has taken the wiser alternative. On her part I would willingly answer that there are a thousand persons she hates more than she does you, and that if she were asked several times she would perhaps end by admitting that you did not exactly dis-

please her. You have on your finger a ring which would fit her to perfection, for your hand is nearly as small as hers, and I am almost certain she would accept it with pleasure."

The good lady stopped for a few moments to see the effect her words produced upon me, and I do not know whether she was satisfied by the expression of my face. I was terribly embarrassed, and I did not know what reply to make. From the commencement of the conversation I had seen the tendency of her insinuations, and although I almost expected the words she had just uttered, I remained surprised and abashed. My only course was a refusal, but what probable motive could I advance for such a refusal? I had none, except that I was a woman. That was, it is true, an excellent reason, but exactly the one I did not care to state.

I could hardly fall back upon ferocious and ridiculous relations; all the relatives in the world would have accepted such a union with enthusiasm. Had Rosette not been what she was, good, beautiful, and well-born, the income of eighty thousand francs would have swept aside all obstacles.

To say that I did not love her would be neither true nor honorable, for I really loved her dearly, much more than a woman loves a woman. I was too young to pretend to be already engaged. My best plan seemed to be to give her to understand that, being the youngest member of the family, the interests of the house required me to join the Order of Malta, and did not permit me to think of marriage, and that it caused me the greatest grief since I had seen Rosette.

This reply was not worth a rap, and I quite realized that fact. The old lady was not duped and did not look upon it as definite; she thought I had made use of it to give myself time to reflect and to consult my relatives. In reality such an alliance was so advantageous and unexpected on my side that it was impossible for me to refuse, even had I loved Rosette but little or not at all; it was a piece of good fortune not to be neglected.

I do not know whether the aunt made the overtures at the niece's instigation, yet I am inclined to think that Rosette had nothing to do with it. She loved me too simply and ardently to think of anything but my immediate possession, and

marriage would assuredly have been the last method she would have employed. The dowager, who must have noticed our intimacy, and without a doubt believed it to be greater than it really was, had arranged the little plan in her head to keep me with her, and as much as possible replace her dear son Henry, killed in the war, to whom she considered I bore such a striking likeness. She had delighted in the idea and profited by that moment of solitude to have an explanation with me. I saw by her manner that she did not consider herself beaten, and that she soon proposed to return to the charge, and that vexed me considerably.

Rosette on her part on the same night made a last effort, which had such serious results that I must make a special story of it, for I cannot include it in this letter, which is already of unreasonable length. You will see for what strange adventures I was predestined, and how Heaven had beforehand designed me for a heroine of romance. I hardly know what morality could be drawn from all this, but existences are not like fables, each chapter has not at its end a rhymed sentence. Very often the sensation of life is that it is not death. That is all. Good-by, dear. I kiss your beautiful eyes. You will receive directly the continuation of my triumphant biography.

CHAPTER XIII

THEODORE—Rosalind—for I know not which name to call you—I come from seeing you just now and I write to you—that I would know your woman's name! It must be as the honey, and hover on the lips more sweet and more harmonious than poesy!

I have never dared to say that to you, and yet I shall die of my silence. No one knows nor will understand what I have suffered. Myself, I am not able to give a feeble idea; words fail to tell of such agonies. I appear to have turned

my sentence to pleasure, being driven hard to say some things new and singular and giving the most extravagant exaggerations, when I depict what I have proved with pictures sufficiently troublesome.

O Rosalind! I love you! I adore you! There is no stronger word to express my feelings! I have never loved, I have never adored any one but you. I prostrate myself, I humble myself before you, and I would force all creation to bend the knee before my idol; you are to me more than all nature, more than myself, more than God. It appears strange to me that God has not come down from heaven to be your slave. Where you are not all is desert, all is death, all is blackness; you alone people the world for me; you are the life, the sun—you are all. Your smile makes the day, your sadness the night; the spheres follow the movements of your body, and the celestial harmonies rule over you. O my dear queen! O my beautiful real dream! You are clothed in splendor, and you swim without ceasing in floods of radiance.

It is hardly three months since I first met you. But I have loved you for a very long time. Before seeing you I languished of love for you; I called you, I sought you, and I despaired of you ever crossing my path, for I knew that I should never be able to love another woman. Many times have you appeared to me at the window of the mysterious castle leaning sadly on the balcony and casting to the winds the petals of some flower—or else, petulant Amazon, on your Turkish steed whiter than snow, traversing at a gallop the somber paths of the forest. How charming you were, with your eyes confiding and soft, your transparent hands, your beautiful wavy hair and your half-smile, so adorably disdainful. Only you were less handsome, for the most ardent and unbridled imagination of a painter or a poet may not attain to the sublime poesy of the reality. There is in you a spring of inexhaustible grace, a fountain always gushing forth irresistible seduction; you are an ornament of the most precious pearls, and in your least movements, in your gestures there is forgetfulness, as well as in your most abandoned poses. You include in each instance, with a royal profusion, some inestimable treasure of beauty. If the outlines of a figure, if

the fugitive lines of an attitude were able to be fixed conserved in a mirror, the glasses before which you have passed might be mistaken, as some public-house signs are, for the most divine paintings of Raphael. Each gesture, each toss of the head, each different aspect of your beauty is graven on the mirror of my soul with a diamond point, and nothing in the world shall have power to efface the profound impression. I know in which place was the shadow and which place was the light; the flat that brightened the rays of the day and the place where the reflection wandered so melting with the more softened complexion of the neck and the cheeks. Absent I delineate you; your ideal pose is always before me. As a child I remained for entire hours upright before the pictures of the old masters, and searched with avidity the dark depths, gazing at the beautiful figures of saints and of goddesses, the flesh of which, of the whiteness of ivory or of wax, stood out so marvelously from the dark background. I admire the simplicity and the magnificence of their figures, the strange grace of their hands and their feet, the pride and the fine character of their features, at the same time so fine and so firm, the grandeur of the draperies that cling about their divine forms, the purplish folds of which appear to lengthen and embrace their fine bodies. By dint of stubbornly plunging my eyes into the canvas thickly smoked by age, my view so disturbed the outlines, some objects losing their precision, and one species of live motionless and dead animated all these pale phantoms of vanished beauty. I ended by discovering these figures had a vague resemblance to the beautiful unknown I adored to the bottom of my heart. I sighed and thought the one I must love was perhaps one of them, and had perhaps been dead these three hundred years. That idea affected me often to the point of shedding tears, and I railed against myself in great anger for not being born in the sixteenth century, when all these beauties had lived. I found it was on my part now a want of skill and unpardonable blunder. As I grew older the sweet phantom beset me yet more closely; I was seeing continually between myself and the women with whom I had love affairs a jeering and ironical smile, taking from their human charm all the perfection of

the divine beauty. It made some very charming women made for giving happiness appear ugly in my eyes.

However, I shall not have been enamored of an adorable shadow the actual body of which I did not believe existed, though it was the presentiment of your own beauty. O Rosalind! I have been so unhappy because of you before knowing you.

O Theodore! I have been unhappy because of you after having known you. If you will, you are able to open to me the paradise of my dreams. You are standing on the threshold as a guardian angel with folded wings, and you hold the golden key in your beautiful hands. Speak, Rosalind, speak, will you?

I await only one word from you to seal my fate. Do decide! Are you Apollo, the hunter from heaven, or Aphrodite rising from the bosom of the sea? Where have you left your car of gems harnessed to four horses of flame? What have you done with your pearl shell and your dolphins with their azure tails? What amorous nymph has melted her body in that of yours in the middle of a kiss? O handsome young man, you are more charming than Cypris or Adonis, more adorable than all the women.

But you are a woman; we are not now in transformation times—Adonis and Hermaphrodite are dead, and it is no longer by a man that beauty shall be realized; for since the heroes and gods are no more you alone conserve in your body of marble, as in the Greek temple, the precious gift of form, and show that the earth has nothing to envy heaven. You worthily represent the first divinity of the world, the most pure symbol of eternal essence—beauty. Since I have seen you something has rent in me, a veil has fallen, a door has opened; I have felt internally inundated by many waves of light; I have learned that my life is before me and that I have at last arrived at the decisive crossroads. The lines obscured and lost in the partly shaded faces that I sought to distinguish in the shadow are suddenly illuminated, the brown colors that darkened the bottom of the picture are softly lightened, a tender dewy gleam has glided on the sea, which is a little green in the distance. The trees, ceasing to appear in con-

fusing shapes, have commenced to stand out in a more distinct fashion. The flowers, charged with dew, have spotted with brilliant points the dull green of the turf. I have seen the bullfinch with his scarlet breast at the end of a branch of elder, the little white rabbit with red eyes and straight ears who puts his head between two blades of thyme, passing his feet over his muzzle, and the timid stag who comes to drink at the brook and see the reflection of his horns in the water. From the morning when the sun of love rose on my life everything changed; where vacillated in the shadows some terrifying forms rendered all the more terrible and monstrous by their vagueness, I can now see groups of trees in flower, surrounded by graceful amphitheaters, silver palaces with their terraces strewn with vases and statues bathing their feet in azure lakes and appearing to swim between two heavens. That which I took in the obscurity for a gigantic dragon with wings armed with claws tearing through the night with scaly feet, is a felucca with silken sail and oars painted and gilt, full of women and musicians; and that frightful crab I believed to be waving above my head his claws is a fan palm the long and narrow leaves of which the night breeze is stirring. My fancies and my errors have vanished—I am in love.

Despairing of ever finding you, I accused my dream of lying and I quarreled furiously with fate. I said that I was very mad to seek a like type, or that nature was very infertile and the Creator very incapable, not having power to realize the simple thought of my heart. Prometheus had the noble pride of will to make a man to rival with God; I myself had created a woman, and I believed that in punishment for my audacity a desire always unsatiated gnawed my liver like another vulture. I expected to be enchained with links of steel on a gray rock beside the savage ocean; but the beautiful sea nymphs with their long green hair rising above the waves, their white necks outstretched, and showing to the sun their bodies of pearl-shell all sparkling with tears of the sea, would not come to rest on the shore to converse with and console me in my trouble as in the play of old *Æschylus*.

It has not been thus.

You have appeared, and I have blamed the weakness of my

imagination. My torment has not been that I fear being perpetually a prey to an idea on a sterile rock; but I have suffered no less. I have seen that in effect you exist, that my presentiments have not lied on that point; but you are presented to me with the ambiguous and terrible beauty of the Sphinx. As Isis, the mysterious goddess, you were enveloped in a veil that I dare not upraise from fear of falling dead. If you knew under my apparent heedlessness with what breathless attention and anxiety I observe you and follow you in all your smallest movements! Nothing escapes me, as I gaze ardently at the little of your flesh which appears, your neck, or your wrists, to try to ascertain your sex! Your hands have been to me a subject of profound study, and I can say that I know the least sinuosities, the most imperceptible veins, the slightest dimple; if you were hidden from head to foot under the most impenetrable mask I could recognize you solely by seeing one of your fingers. I analyze the undulations of your walk, the manner in which you place your feet or brush back your hair. I seek to surprise your secret in the habit of your body; I watch you above all in those hours of lassitude when the bones seem withdrawn from the body and when the limbs are depressed and pliant as if they were untied, to see if the feminine contours are more pronounced in that state of forgetfulness and carelessness.

Never has any person been watched more closely than you; I forget myself for hours in my contemplation. Retired in some corner of the salon, having in hand a book that I am not reading, or crouched behind the curtain of my chamber when you are in yours and the blinds of your window are raised, and, much impressed by the marvelous beauty which clings around you like a luminous atmosphere, I say to myself, assuredly that is a woman. Then all at once a movement brusque and bold, a deep tone or a cavalier fashion, destroys in one minute my frail edifice of probabilities, and I repeat my former doubts. I am traversing the uncharted ocean of my amorous musing under full sail, and you come to seek me to fence with you or play tennis. The young girl transformed into a young cavalier gives me some terrible strokes with her foil, striking my own weapon from my hand, as quick and

nimble as the bravo trained to fence. Each instant of the day brings a like disappointment. I venture to address you to-day, my dear girl. It is you I adore, and I see you tenderly bending to the ear of a lady and whispering beyond her hair some facetious poem or compliment. Judge of my situation—or well, some woman, that in my strange jealousy I might live with the greatest voluptuousness in the world, she hanging on your arm and holding you aside for confiding to you some puerile secrets and holding you for hours in the recess of the window.

I am enraged at seeing the women speak to you, for that makes me believe you are a man, and even had you been I should not have suffered such extreme pain. When the men approach freely and familiarly I am still more jealous, because I dream that you are a woman, and that they have perhaps the same suspicion as myself. I am a prey to the most contrary passions, and know not what to do.

I am angry with myself; I most bitterly reproach myself for being thus tormented by a visionary love and not having the strength to tear from my heart that venomous plant which sprang up in a night like a poisonous mushroom. I curse you, I call you my evil genius, I have believed in the same instant that you are Beelzebub in person, for I have no power to explain the sensation I experience before you. When I was fully persuaded that you were a woman in disguise, the improbability of motives likely to justify such a caprice renewed my uncertainty, and I began again to deplore that the ideal I had dreamed for the love of my soul belonged to some one of the same sex as myself. I reviled the chance that had made a man of such charming appearance, and for my eternal misfortune had brought us together when I had given up hope of seeing realized the idea of pure beauty that I had caressed for so long in my heart. Now, Rosalind, I have the profound certainty that you are the most beautiful of women; I have seen you in the costume of your sex. I have seen your shoulders, your arms so pure and so correctly rounded, and the commencement of your breast, as displayed by your partly open vest, and they can belong only to a young girl; Meleager, the beautiful hunter, nor Bacchus the effeminate, with their

doubtful forms, have ever had a like softness of lines nor such fine skins, although both being of marble of Paros polished by the amorous kisses of twenty ages, I am not tormented in that direction. But that is not all. You are a woman, and my love is no longer reprehensible. I can then display my feelings without remorse and allow myself to drift towards you. Great and unbridled though the passion be that I experience, it is permitted, and I avow it. Rosalind, for you I burn in silence, and you ignore the immensity of my love. That revelation is slow in coming to you. That is not surprising. I hate you not; I love you. Will you be able to love me? I know not—and I tremble, for I am more unhappy now than before. For instance, it appears to me that you do not hate me. When we have acted if *I please you*, you have given to certain parts of your rôle a particular accent which has augmented the sense and in some way induced me to declare myself. I have believed that I saw in your eyes and in your smile gracious promise of indulgence, and felt your hand respond to the pressure of mine. If I was deceived! O God! That is a thing on which I dare not reflect! Encouraged by all that and urged by my love, I have written to you, for the clothing you wear ill suits such a confession, and a thousand times have the words stopped on my lips, even when I had the idea and firm conviction that I spoke to a woman; that male costume shocked all my tender, loving thoughts and hindered them from taking their flight towards you.

I beg you, Rosalind, if you do not yet love me, strive to do so; me who has loved you in spite of all, under the veil which envelops you by pity for us without doubt. Devote not the rest of your life to more frightful despair and to more gloomy discouragement; dream that I adore you, from the first ray of the thought in my head that you were revealed before, and that since I was a child you have appeared to me in dreams with a crown of drops of dew, two prismatic wings, and a little blue flower in your hand. That you are the aim, the means, and the savor of my life; that without you I am nothing but a vain apparition, and that if you blow out the flame you have lighted there will remain at the most of me

one pinch of dust more fine and impalpable than that which sprinkles the wings of the dead. Rosalind, you have many recipes for healing love-sickness, heal me, for I am very ill. Play your part up to the end. Throw off the clothing of the beautiful page Ganymede and give your white hand to the youngest son of the brave knight Roland de Bois.

CHAPTER XIV

I WAS at my window occupied in gazing at the stars, which were twinkling joyously in the flower-gardens of heaven, and breathing the beautiful perfume of the night borne upon a dying breeze. The wind from the open window had extinguished my lamp, the last which remained alight in the château. My thoughts degenerated into vague reverie, and a species of somnolence took me. However, I remained still leaning on the stone balustrade, fascinated by the charm of the night. Careless and forgetful Rosette, seeing my lamp no longer burning, and not being able to distinguish me because of a great angle of shadow which fell precisely on the window, had believed without doubt that I was gone to bed, and the time had come for risking a last and desperate attempt. She pushed the door so softly that I did not hear her enter, and she was within two steps of me before I perceived her. She was very astonished at seeing me still up, but quickly recovering from her surprise, she came to me and took my arm and called me twice by my name, "Theodore, Theodore."

"What, you, Rosette, here at this hour, all alone without a light!"

"Is that a reproach, Theodore? or is it only a simple phrase purely exclamatory? Yes, me, Rosette, the beautiful lady, here in your room with you, and not in mine, where I should be at eleven o'clock at night or perhaps midnight, without duenna or chaperon or maid—that is very astonishing, is it not? I am quite as surprised as you, and I know not what

explanation to give you." In saying that she passed one of her arms around my body.

"Rosette," I said, trying to free myself, "I must relight the lamp; nothing is more sad than darkness in a chamber—and then it is truly murder not seeing clearly when you are present and being deprived of the spectacle of your beauty. Permit me the means of getting a morsel of tinder and a match, that I may make a little sun to illuminate all that the jealous night effaces under her shadows."

"That is no hardship; I prefer you not to see my blushes. I feel my cheeks all burning, for I am dying of shame."

She dropped her face upon my breast; she remained some minutes thus, as if suffocated with emotion. I, during that time, passed mechanically my fingers through the long curls of her streaming hair. I sought in my brain some honest way of escaping from my embarrassing position, but found it not. I was in my last entrenchment, and Rosette appeared quite decided not to retire from the position she had taken up. I myself had only an open dressing-gown, which very poorly disguised me, and I was uneasy as to the result.

"Theodore, hear me," said Rosette, rising, throwing her hair on both sides of her face as far as I could see in the feeble light that the stars and a tiny crescent of the moon, which had just commenced to rise, threw into the room through the open casement. "The step that I take is a strange one; everybody will blame me for it; but you are leaving very soon, and I love you! I will not let you go without being explicit with you. Perhaps you may never return; perhaps this is the first and last time that I shall see you. Who knows where you go? But go where you will, you carry my spirit and my life with you. If you were remaining I should not have come to this extremity! The happiness of contemplating and of hearing you, of living by the side of you would have sufficed. I should have demanded nothing more. I should have shut up my love in my heart; you would only have looked upon me as a good and sincere friend. But that may not be. You say that absolutely you must leave—that wearies you. Theodore, look upon me not as an amorous shadow that may not follow you and would vanish in your body. It must dis-

please you to find, always behind you, the same suppliant eyes and hands held out to seize the border of your mantle. I know you, but this will not hinder me. Besides, you cannot complain. Is it not your own fault? I was calm, tranquil, almost happy, before knowing you. You arrive, handsome, young, smiling like a Phœbus, the charming god. You have paid me the most impressive attentions, the most delicate homage. Never was a cavalier more spiritual and more gallant. Your lips each minute let fall some roses and rubies—everything becoming for you an occasion for poesy, and you know how to turn the most insignificant phrases into adorable compliments. A woman who at first mortally hated you would finish by loving you, and I loved you from the instant I saw you. Why, then, do you appear surprised, having been so amiable, at being dearly loved? Is it not a natural consequence? I am not a fool nor thoughtless, nor a little romantic girl who falls in love with the first sword she sees. I know the world and what is called life. What I am doing, all women—even the most virtuous, most prudish—have done as much. What idea and what intention have you? That of pleasing me, I imagine. For I cannot suppose any other. Why is it then that you have such a sorrowful look, having so completely succeeded? If I have done anything unwittingly that has displeased you, I demand your pardon. Is it that you do not find me beautiful enough, or have you discovered in me some great default that you reject? You have the right of being hard to please. But you have lied strangely if I am not beautiful. I am young as you, and I love you. Why now do you disdain me?

“You are eager to be near me, you sustain my arm with such constant solicitude, you press so tenderly the hand I give you, you raise towards me such languorous eyes. If you love me not, of what good is all this deception? Would you by chance be so cruel as to light the flame of love in a heart afterwards to make it the subject of laughter? Ah, that would be horrible raillery, an impiety, a sacrilege! That would only be the amusement of a deranged mind and I do not believe that of you. What is then the cause of this sudden change of front? As for me, I can see nothing. What mystery hides a

coldness like this? I will not believe that you have any repugnance for me; of that you have given proof, for no one courts a woman keenly for whom he has any dislike. To do so one would need to be the greatest knave on earth. O Theodore, what have you against me? Who has changed you thus? What have I done? If the love that you appeared to have for me has flown, mine, alas, has remained and I cannot tear it from my heart. Have pity on me, Theodore, for I am very unhappy. Do at least seem to love me a little, and speak to me a few soft words that will not cost you much, to prove at least that you have not an insurmountable horror of me."

In that pathetic passage of her discourse her sobs completely choked her voice. She crossed her two hands on my shoulders and there rested her forehead in an attitude of despair. All that she had said was not more than just, and I had no satisfactory reply to make. I was not able to take a bantering tone; that would have been quite out of place. Rosette was not one of those creatures that one has power to treat lightly; besides, I was too touched to be able to do it. I felt myself culpable of playing thus with the heart of a charming woman, and I experienced the most lively and the most sincere remorse in the world. Seeing that I did not answer, the dear child heaved a long sigh and made a movement as if to rise, but she collapsed beneath her emotion. Then she surrounded me with her arms, the freshness of which penetrated my doublet, placed her face on mine, and fell to crying silently. The effect on me, of feeling thus streaming on my cheeks that inexhaustible current of tears, was singular. I was not slow in their mingling with mine, and that was a truly bitter shower, copious enough to cause a new deluge, if it had lasted only forty days. The moon at that instant there shone precisely on the window; one pale ray plunged into the chamber, and lit with a bluish gleam our silent group. With her hair scattered and her dolorous looks, Rosette had the appearance of a figure in alabaster of Melancholy seated on a tomb. As for me I know not how I looked, seeing that I could not see myself, not having a mirror; but I think I could very well have sat for a statue of uncertainty personified. I was troubled, and I lavished on Rosette caresses more tender

than usual. From her hair my hand had fallen to her velvet neck and from there to her round and polished shoulder, that I patted softly, and when I followed the trembling line the child vibrated under my touch as a key under the fingers of a musician; her flesh started and quivered and a tremor ran the length of her body. Myself I experienced a vague and confused longing, which I was not able to analyze, and I felt a great pleasure in caressing her pure and delicate features. I quitted her shoulder and profiting by the opening of a fold I enclosed suddenly in my hand her little affrighted throat, which palpitated distractedly as a turtle-dove surprised in her nest. From the extreme line of her cheek, which I skimmed over with a kiss, I arrived at her partly open mouth. We remained thus some time; I know not for example if it was two minutes or a quarter of an hour or one hour; for I had totally lost the notion of time, and I know not if I was in heaven or on earth, here or elsewhere, dead or living. The delightful wine of pleasure had so far intoxicated me at the first gulp I had drunk that all my reason was gone. Rosette embraced me still more tightly with her arms, and enveloped all my body. She leaned on me convulsively, pressing me to her breast, and with each passionate kiss her life seemed to run entirely to the place touched and leave the rest of her person. Some singular ideas passed through my head. I should, if I had not been afraid of betraying my disguise, have responded to the passionate bursts of Rosette, and perhaps made some vain and foolish attempt for giving an appearance of reality to that shadow of pleasure that my beautiful lover embraced with much ardor. I had not yet had a lover, and these lively attacks, her reiterated caresses, and sweet kisses disturbed me greatly, although they were from a woman; and then that nocturnal visit, that romantic passion, the moonlight, all had for me a freshness and a charm of novelty which made me forget for the moment that I was not a man.

However, making a great effort to control myself, I told Rosette that she horribly compromised herself by coming into my chamber at such an hour and remaining there so long,

that her women would notice her absence, and see that she had not passed the night in her apartment. I said that so softly that Rosette believed, the poor child, that the happy hour she had striven for so laboriously was going to strike at last for her. She was once more disappointed. My situation was most critical, when the door turned on its hinges and gave entrance to Chevalier Alcibiades in person; he held a taper in one hand and his sword in the other. He came straight towards us, putting the light under the nose of the confused Rosette. He said in a bantering tone:

"Good-day, my sister."

Poor little Rosette had not the strength to utter one word in reply.

"It seems, my very dear and very virtuous sister, that having judged in your wisdom that the company of Signor Theodore was more pleasant than your own, you have come to visit him? Or perhaps there are ghosts in your chamber and you have thought that you would be safer here, under the protection of the said Signor? That is a good thought. So, Monsieur the Knight of Sérannes, you have made soft eyes at Madam my sister, and you believe that it is no concern of mine. I think it will not be out of place if I cut your throat a little, and if you will be so good I shall be infinitely obliged to you. Theodore, you have abused the friendship that I had for you, and you make me repent of the good opinion that I at once formed on the loyalty of your character. It is a great pity."

I, not being able to defend myself in a valid manner, appearances are against me,—for who would have believed me if I had said, as actually happened, that Rosette had come into my chamber against my will, and that far from seeking to please her, I did all that was possible to turn her away from me?—I had but one thing to say. I said to him:

"Signor Alcibiades, we—we will fight when you please."

During this colloquy Rosette had not omitted to faint, the usual action under similar circumstances. I went to a crystal cup full of water, and after plunging the end of a great white rose partly in bloom into it, I sprinkled some drops on her face that made her come to promptly. Not

knowing how to keep her countenance, she collapsed beside the bed and buried her pretty head under the coverlet, like a bird preparing for sleep. She had so gathered the wraps and the cushions around her that it would have been very difficult to discern what it was under the heap. Some sweet little sighs going forth from time to time alone made it possible to discover that it was a young repentent sinner, or at least one excessively sorry for sinning in intention and not in reality, which was the case of poor Rosette. Monsieur the brother, not having any more uneasiness about his sister, resumed the dialogue, and said to me in a somewhat gentler tone:

"It is not absolutely indispensable for us to cut each other's throats immediately; that is an extreme means and one is always in time to exert oneself. Listen; the match is not equal between us. You are in your first youth, and much less vigorous than I. If we fight I shall kill you, or assuredly disfigure you; and I would rather not kill nor disfigure you; that would be a pity. Rosette, who is down there under the coverlet without speaking, would attempt my life, for she is spiteful and bad as a tigress when she is upset, that dear little dove. You don't know that; you who have been her Prince Galaor, and who received nothing but charming sweetness, all without avail. Rosette is free, you also. It appears you are not irreconcilable enemies; her mourning is drawing to an end, and the best thing in the world for her. Marry her; she will not want to live alone again. And in that case I shall refrain from making you the scabbard of my sword—that would not be agreeable either to you or for me. What do you think of it?"

I was obliged to make a horrible grimace, for that which he proposed was of all things in the world the most impracticable for me. I would sooner have walked with four feet against the ceiling as the flies do, and unhooked the sun without taking the footstool to heighten me, than do that which he demanded of me, and yet the last proposition was uncontestedly more agreeable than the first. He appeared surprised that I did not accept with transport, and repeated what he had said, to give me time to reply.

"The alliance would be most honorable for me, and one I

had never dared to hope. I know that it is an unheard-of stroke of luck for a young man who has neither rank nor position in the world, comprising as it does the most illustrious treasure of all, happiness; but, still, I must persist in my refusal, and since I have the liberty of choice between the duel and the marriage, I prefer the duel. That is a singular taste, that few men would have, but it is mine."

Here Rosette uttered a most dolorous sob, raising her head and quickly dropping it again, as a snail when one strikes its horns, on seeing my impassive and determined face.

"It is not that I do not love Madam Rosette; I love her infinitely, but I have reasons for not marrying, which you yourself would find excellent, if it were possible for me to tell you. Besides, things have not gone as far as appearances seem to indicate; beyond some kisses and an ardent friendship, I can explain and justify, there is nothing between us I am ashamed to acknowledge, and the virtue of your sister is assuredly the most intact and the most pure in all the world"—I owed her that testimony. "Now at what time do we fight, Monsieur Alcibiades, and at what place?"

"Here, immediately!" cried Alcibiades, mad with fury.

"What, in the presence of Rosette?"

"Draw, wretch, or I will assassinate you!" he continued, brandishing his sword and waving it round his head.

"At least let us go from the chamber."

"If you don't put up your guard I will nail you against the wall like a bat, my handsome Celadon, and you shall finely flap the wings you will not liberate, I tell you," and he rushed on me with his sword. I drew my rapier, for he would have done as he said, and I contented myself at first with parrying the thrusts he delivered. Rosette made a superhuman effort, trying to throw herself between our swords, for the two combatants were equally dear to her, but her strength betrayed her, and she rolled senseless at the foot of the bed. Our irons clashed, making the noise of an anvil, for the little space we had forced us to close quarters, and Alcibiades two or three times almost reached me, and if I had not had an excellent master with regard to arms my life would have been in great danger, for with astonishing skill and prodigious

strength, he exhausted all the ruses and feints of fencing in his efforts to touch me. Enraged at not being able to reach me, he uncovered himself two or three times. I would not profit by the openings, but he returned to the charge in so enraged and savage a fashion that I was forced to seize a chance which he left me, and since the noise, flashing, and whirling of the steel intoxicated and dazzled me, I thought not of death. I had not the least fear; that point, sharp and deadly, which came before my eyes each second, had no more effect upon me than if I was fighting with the button foils, only I was indignant at the brutality of Alcibiades, and the sentiment of my perfect innocence greatly augmented that indignation. I would only prick his arm or his shoulder to make his sword fall from his hands, for I had vainly essayed to strike it from his grip. He had a wrist of iron, and my efforts were quite unavailing. At last he delivered a thrust so fiercely and so low that I could only half parry it. My sleeve was pierced, and I felt the cold iron on my arm, but I was not wounded. At that sight anger took me, and in place of defending I attacked in my turn. I forgot that he was Rosette's brother, and I rushed on him as if he had been my mortal enemy. Profiting by the false position of his sword, I launched a thrust at his flank so well directed that it reached his side. He said "Oh!" and fell backward. I believed him dead, but he was not really, only wounded, and his failure arose from a false step which he had made in essaying to break. I cannot explain the sensation that I then experienced. Certainly it is not a difficult reflection to make that in striking the flesh with a fine and trenchant point, one pierces a hole and the blood gushes out. However, I fell into a profound stupor at seeing growing red stains on the doublet of Alcibiades. I know that never before in my life had I experienced such a great surprise, and it seemed to me that something very much out of the common had taken place.

It was not such an unusual occurrence after all. Still it appeared so to me that the blood ran from a wound, and that the wound had been opened by me, and that a young girl of my age (I was about to write a young man, so have I entered into the spirit of my part) had struck down a vigorous cap-

tain trained in arms as was the Signor Alcibiades, all for the crime of seduction and refusal of marriage with a young woman—very rich and, what is more, very charming!

I was truly in a cruelly embarrassing position with the fainting sister, the brother that I believed dead, and myself not much further from being dead or fainting than the other two. I hung to the cord of the bell and I rang loudly enough to waken the dead, so much that the rope remained in my hand. Leaving to Rosette swooning and to Alcibiades embowelled the task of explaining to the domestics and to the old aunt, I went straight to the stable. The air quickly revived me; I led out my horse and saddled and bridled him myself; I satisfied myself that the crupper and the curb were in good order; I put the stirrups of the same length, I tightened the girths by a notch—briefly—I harnessed him completely with an attention at least singular at such a moment and a calmness inconceivable after a combat thus terminated. I mounted my horse, and I crossed the park by a path that I knew; the branches of the trees all laden with dew whipped me and wetted my face. It was as if the old trees extended their arms to retain me and keep me for love of their châteline. If I had been in another state of mind, or at all superstitious, I might have looked upon them as so many phantoms about to seize me and shaking their fists at me. But really my ideas had entirely deserted me and I was gripped by a leaden stupor so strong that I was hardly conscious of its weight on the brain like a helmet too tight; only it seemed to me that I had killed some one, and that was the reason of my departure. I had besides a horrible inclination to sleep because of the early hour, for the violence of the emotions of that night had a physical reaction, and had fatigued me bodily. I arrived at a little gate which opened on the fields by a secret which Rosette had shown me in one of our walks. I dismounted from my horse, I touched the button and pushed the door, I regained the saddle after leading my horse through, and made him gallop so far that I regained the high road to P., where I arrived at early daybreak. This is the very faithful and very circumstantial history of my first good fortune, and my first duel.

CHAPTER XV

It was five o'clock in the morning when I entered the town. The people in the houses looked out of the windows, the brave natives displaying their benign faces surmounted by a pyramidal night-cap, at the steps of my horse, whose hoofs sounded loudly on the uneven and pebbly road, and the Venuses of the place exhibited their red faces and matutinal bare breasts, as they wearied themselves in conjectures on the unwonted appearance of a traveler in C. at a like hour and in such equipment, for I was very sparsely clothed in a dress to say the least suspicious. I made a little boy, who had his hair over his eyes and a muzzle like a water-spaniel, direct me to an inn, giving him some pence for his pains and a conscientious flick with my riding-whip, which made him fly away screaming like a jay plucked alive. I threw myself on to a bed and slept soundly. When I awoke it was three o'clock in the afternoon. That hardly sufficed to rest me completely. It was not enough for a restless night, an adventure, a duel, and a very rapid and successful flight.

I was very anxious about Alcibiades's wound; but some days after I was completely reassured, for I learnt that nothing dangerous followed and that he was quite convalescent. This relieved me of a singular weight, for the idea of having killed a man strangely tormented me, although it was in legitimate defense and against my own will. I was not yet arrived to that state of sublime indifference to the lives of men which I have since reached.

I returned to C. Many of the young men with whom I had traveled I met again. That gave me pleasure; I became more intimate with them, and they introduced me into many agreeable houses. I was perfectly used to my dress, and the rude and active life I had led and the violent exercises in which I had taken part had rendered me twice as robust as I was before. I followed the young madbrains everywhere; I rode, hunted, and joined in their orgies. I had learnt to drink, though without attaining to the German capacity of

some of them; I could empty two or three bottles for my part without becoming very tipsy—very satisfactory progress. I made exquisite verses like a god, and I kissed deliberately enough the girls at the inn. In short I became an accomplished young cavalier in conformity with the latest fashion of the time. I rid myself of certain provincial ideas I had about virtue and other such-like notions. On the contrary, I became so extremely delicate on points of honor that I fought a duel almost daily; that same was become for me a necessity, a species of indispensable exercise, without which I should have ill carried myself all day. Also, when no one had looked at me, or trodden on my foot, and I had no motive for fighting, sooner than rest idle with nothing on my hands I would serve as second to my comrades, or the same to men whom I only knew by name. I had soon a colossal renown for bravery, and nothing less than that would have stopped the pleasantness which would have been infallibly suggested by my beardless face and effeminate appearance. But three or four surplus buttonholes that I opened in some doublets, and a few slices carved very delicately from some recalcitrant skins generally caused my appearance to be thought more manly than Mars in person, or Priapus himself, and men were to be found who swore they had held my bastards at the baptismal font. Beyond all this apparent dissipation and wasting life, I did not neglect the carrying out of my primary idea, that this is to say the conscientious study of man and the solution of the great problem of a perfect lover, a problem not less difficult to solve than the philosopher's stone. It is of certain ideas as of the horizon, which certainly exists when you see it in front of you whichever side you turn, but which obstinately flies before you, whether you step slowly or go at a gallop, and remains always at the same distance, for it cannot manifest itself except with a determined condition of distance, it is destroyed in a measure as you advance to form farther off its fleeting, unsatisfying azure, and it is in vain that you try to catch it by the border of its flying mantle. The more I advanced in the knowledge of the animal, the more I saw to what point the realization of my desire was impossible, and how far what I demanded

for happily loving was beyond the condition of his nature. I was convinced that the man who would be most sincerely in love with me would find the means with the best will in the world to make me the most miserable of women, and still I had abandoned many of my girlish exigencies, I was fallen from sublime clouds, not altogether into the street and the kennel, but upon a hill of medium height, accessible, but a little steep. The climb, it is true, was rough enough; but I had the pride of believing that I was value for the trouble of the effort, and that I should be a sufficient compensation for the exertion required. I could never resolve to take a step forward. I waited patiently, perched on my summit. Here was my plan: under my manly dress I should make the acquaintance with some young man whose exterior pleased me. I should live familiarly with him; by some adroit questions and false confidences, which would provoke true ones, I should soon acquire a complete knowledge of his sentiments and his thoughts; and if I found him such as I wished, I should pretend to make a journey, and keep away from him for three or four months, to give him time to forget my features. Then I should return in my woman's costume, and arrange in a retired suburb a voluptuous little house hidden by trees and flowers. I should dispose things so that he met me and made love to me, and if he showed a true and faithful love for me I should give myself to him without restriction or precaution. The title of his mistress would have to me appeared honorable; I should not have demanded any other. But assuredly that plan will not be put in execution, for that is a plan's usual fate, and in that is displayed principally the frailty of the will and the pure nothingness of man. The proverb that what God wills woman wills is not more true than any other proverb; that is to say, not at all. So when I had only seen men at a distance and beyond my desire, they had appeared handsome to me and the eye had made an illusion. Now, at last, I found them frightful, and I could not understand how a woman could admit them into her bed. As to me, my heart turns against it; I could not bring myself to it. Their features are gross, ignoble, without elegance. What lines hurtful and unpleasant they have, how dark, and furrowed are their skins.

Some are as swarthy as if they had been hanged for six months; they are emaciated, bony, hairy, with violin strings on their hands, and great feet like a drawbridge; a dirty mustache, is always full of food, and turned up like a hook to the ears; the long hair rough as the bristles of a broom, chin ending like that of a wild boar, the lips cracked and dry from strong liquors, eyes surrounded by three or four black rings, and the neck full of stretched veins, great muscles, and projecting cartilages. Others are mattresses of red meat, pushing before them a belly that their waist-belt will hardly encircle; they open and wink their little sea-green eyes, inflamed with luxury, and resemble much more a hippopotamus in trousers than human creatures. They smell always of wine or brandy or tobacco, or their natural odor, which is much the worst of all. As to those whose forms are a little less disgusting, they resemble ill-formed women—that is all.

I had not remarked all that I was in life as in a cloud, my feet hardly touching the earth. The odor of the roses and lilies of spring was borne to my head like too strong a perfume. I only dreamt of accomplished heroes, faithful and respectful lovers, flames worthy of the altar, marvelous devotions and sacrifices, and I should have believed I had found all that in the first scoundrel that wished me good day. However, the first and greatest intoxication did not last long. Strange suspicions seized me, and I had no rest until I had cleared them away. At first the horror that I had for men was pushed to the last degree of exaggeration, and I regarded them as dreadful monstrosities; their manners, modes of thought, and negligent, cynical language, their brutalities and scorn of women shocked and revolted me to the last point of many of the ideas I had formed; very few were realized. They are not monsters if you will, but much worse than that, my faith! There are some excellent boys of very jovial humor, who eat and drink well, who will render you all sorts of services spirited and brave, good painters and good musicians who are good for a thousand things except, however, for the one for which they were created, viz. mate to the animal called woman, with whom they have not the slightest

bearing, physical or moral. I had at first some trouble in disguising the contempt which they inspired me with, but little by little I accustomed myself to their manner of life. I felt no more piqued at the railleries they launched against women than if I had been of their sex. I made, on the contrary, some very good jests, the success of which strangely flattered my pride; assuredly none of my comrades went as far as I did in sarcasms and pleasantries on the subject. The perfect knowledge of the ground gave me a great advantage and beyond their piquant turn my brilliant epigrams shone from the merit of an exactitude which theirs often lacked. For much of the ill that is often said of women is not without some foundation; it is none the less difficult for men to preserve the indifference necessary to jest about them decently or properly, and there is often a deal of love in their invectives.

I noticed that it was those that were most tender and had the most feeling for women who treated them worse than the others, and who returned to the subject with a particular animosity, as if they had a mortal rancor on account of their not being what they wished, and falsifying the good opinion they conceived at first. That which I demanded before all was not physical beauty, it was beauty of the soul, love; but love as I feel it is perhaps not in the human possibilities—and yet it appears to me that I must love thus and that I give more than I exact. What magnificent folly! What sublime prodigality! To deliver yourself entirely without caring anything for self, renouncing the possession of yourself and your freedom of will, placing it in the hands of another, to see no more with your eyes or hear with your ears, being one in two bodies, to melt and mingle your souls in such fashion that you would not know if you were yourself or the other being, now the sun, now the moon, to see all the world created in one being only, displacing the center of life, to be ready at all times for the greatest sacrifices and the most absolute abnegation, to suffer in the bosom of the person loved as if it was your own, oh, wonder, to double yourself while giving yourself! That is love as I conceive it. Faithful as the ivy, entwining like the young vine, cooing as the turtledove,

these are indispensable and are the first and most simple conditions.

If I had remained at home under the dress of my sex, sadly turning my wheel or working tapestry behind the embrasure of a windowpane, that which I have sought through the world would perhaps have found me of itself, for love is like fortune and dislikes being pursued. It visits of preference those that sleep beside the wells, and often the kisses of queens and gods descend upon closed eyes. There is one thing which lures and deceives you, the thought that all the adventures and all the happiness exist only in places where you are not, and it is a sad mistake to saddle your horse and post off after your ideal. Many people make that error, many others will still make it. The horizon is always the most charming azure, although when you arrive at the hills they are often composed of poor cracked clay or rain-washed ocher.

I had imagined that the world was full of adorable young men, and that on the roads one met battalions of Esplandians, Amadis, and Lancelots of the Lake pursuing their Dulcineas, and I was very much astonished that the world took very little heed of that sublime search and was content to share the bed of the first harlot that came in the way. I am well punished for my curiosity and distrust. I am used up in the most horrible manner possible without having had enjoyment.

With me knowledge has advanced before use; nothing is much worse than these forward experiences which are not the fruit of action. Ignorance the most complete would be a thousand times better. It would at least commit you to many foolish things which would serve to instruct and rectify your ideas; for under the disgust of which I was speaking there is always a lively and rebellious element which produces the most strange disorders: the spirit is convinced, the body is not, and will not subscribe to this superb disdain. The young and robust body acts and winces under the spirit like a vigorous stallion ridden by a feeble old man whom, however, he is unable to throw, for the curb holds the head and the bit tears his mouth.

Since I have lived with the men I have seen so many women unworthily betrayed, so many secret connections imprudently

divulged, the most pure loves dragged through the mire, young men running to frightful courtesans leaving the arms of the most charming mistresses, the best-established intrigues broken suddenly and without plausible motive, that I now find it not possible to decide on taking a lover. It would be to throw oneself in full daylight with eyes open into a bottomless pit. However, the secret wish of my heart is still to have one. The voice of nature stifles the voice of reason. I feel strongly that I shall never be happy if I do not love and am not loved. But the misfortune is that one can only have a man for a lover, and if the men are not all devils they are very far from being angels. It would be useless to stick feathers on their shoulder blades and on their heads a halo of gilt paper. I know too much to be thus deceived.

All the fine things they might say to me would be of no avail. I know in advance what they will say and could say it myself. I have seen them studying their parts and rehearsing before going on the stage. I know their principal tirades by heart and the passages on which they count. Neither pallor of face nor alteration of features would convince me. I know that they prove nothing. A night of orgy, a few bottles of wine, and two or three girls are sufficient to wrinkle the face very conveniently. I have seen this fine trick practiced by a young marquis, by nature very rosy and fresh-colored, who found himself the better for it, for to that touching pallor he owed the crowning of his passion. I know also how the most languorous Celadons console themselves for the rigors of their Astræas and find means for being patient in awaiting the happy hour. I have seen slatterns serving as doubles for chaste Ariadnes.

In truth, after that no man tempts me much, for he has not beauty as the woman, beauty, that splendid vestment which disguises so well the soul's imperfection, that divine drapery cast by God over the nudity of the world which makes it in some way excusable to love the vilest courtesan of the kennel, if she possesses the magnificent and royal gift. In default of virtues of the soul I would at least have the exquisite perfection of form, satiny flesh, roundness of contour, softness of line, fineness of skin, in fact all that makes the charm

of woman. Since I cannot have love I would have voluptuousness, imperfectly replacing the brother by the sister. But all the men I have seen appear to me to be frightfully ugly; my horse is a hundred times more handsome, and I should have less repugnance in embracing him than certain marvelous fellows who think themselves very charming. Certainly a fop like those I know would not be a very brilliant theme to embroider with variants of pleasure. A military man would hardly be more suitable for me; they have a mechanical walk, and there is something bestial in their faces which makes me consider them hardly human. The gentlemen of the robe delight me no more: they are dirty, oily, hairy, threadbare, with glassy eyes and lipless mouths; they smell extraordinarily rank and moldy, and I should have no inclination to put my face against their lynx or badger-like muzzles. As to poets, they think of nothing in the world but the endings of words, and go no farther back than to the penultimate, and it is true to say that they are difficult to conveniently utilize; they are more wearisome than the others, they are also ugly and have not the least distinction nor the least elegance in their figure, and their attire is truly singular. Some men who are occupied all the day with form and beauty perceive not that their boots are ill made and their hats ridiculous; they have the appearance of country apothecaries or trainers of learned dogs out of work, and would disgust you from poetry and verse for many eternities. Besides painters are also enormously stupid; they see nothing beyond the seven colors. One of two that I had passed some days with at R., and who was asked what he thought of me, made this ingenious reply: "He is warm in tone, and in the shadows pure Naples yellow should be employed instead of white with a little Cassel ocher and reddish brown." That was his opinion, and more, his nose was crooked, and his eyes as his nose, so they did not improve his appearance. Whom shall I take—a military man with a bulging chest, a limb of the law with convex shoulders, a poet or painter with a scared look, a thin little coxcomb without means? Which cage shall I choose in that menagerie? I ignore these completely, and I feel no inclination for one side or the other, for they are as

perfectly equal as possible in foolishness and ugliness. After that there remains only one thing for me to do, that would be to take some one that I loved, whether a porter or a jockey! But I love not a porter, O unhappy heroine that I am, unmated turtle-dove condemned to elegiac cooings. Oh, how many times have I wished that I were truly a man as I appear to be. How many women I should have understood and whose hearts would have understood mine. How perfectly happy I should have been with those delicacies of love, those noble bursts of pure passion to which I should have been able to respond. What softness, what delights, as all the sensitiveness of my soul would have freely blossomed without being obliged to close and contract every minute under some coarse touch! What charming efflorescence of invisible flowers which never opened, and whose mysterious perfume would have sweetly embalmed the fraternal soul! It seems to me that would have been an enchanting life, an infinite ecstasy with wings outstretched, promenades with hands entwined, without releasing their hold under the avenues of golden foliage, through groves of eternally smiling roses, in parks full of fish-ponds with gliding swans and alabaster vases hanging amid the leaves. If I had been a young man how I should have loved Rosette; what adoration that would have been, our souls being truly made for each other, two pearls destined to melt together and so make but one. How perfectly would I have realized the idea that she had formed to love. Her character suited me completely, and her style of beauty pleased me. It is a pity that our love was totally condemned to indispensable platonism.

An adventure has lately happened to me. I used to go to a house where there was a very charming little girl about fifteen years old or more. I had never seen a more adorable miniature; she was fair, but so delicately and transparently fair that ordinary blondes would have appeared brown and as dark as moles beside her. One would have said that she had golden hair powdered with silver; her eyebrows were of a tint so soft and melting that they were hardly visible; her eyes, of a pale blue, had the most velvety look and the most silky lashes imaginable; her mouth, too small to put the

tip of your finger into it, added still more to the childish and exquisite character of her beauty, and the soft roundness and the dimples of her cheeks had an inexpressible ingenuousness of charm. All her dear little person charmed me beyond expression. I loved her little frail white hands, transparent as the day, her bird-like foot which hardly touched the ground, her figure which a breath would have broken, and her pearly shoulders, not yet developed, that her scarf, put crosswise, happily betrayed. Her chatter, to which artlessness gave a new piquancy to her natural humor, engaged me for hours at a time, and I was singularly pleased in making her talk. She would utter a thousand delicious drolleries with an extraordinary fineness of intention, even without having apparently the least knowledge in the world of their meaning, thus making them a thousand times more attractive.

I gave her bonbons and sweets that I reserved expressly for her in a light shell box which pleased her very much, for she is as dainty as the true pussy-cat, which she is. As soon as I arrived she would run up to me and tap my pockets to see if the very pretty bonbon box was there, and I made her run from one hand to the other, and fight a little battle, which always ended by her gaining the upper hand and completely rifling me. One day, however, she contented herself with saluting me with a very grave air, and came not as she ordinarily did to see if the fountain of sweets was still flowing in my pocket. She remained proudly on her chair, quite upright, with her elbows drawn back.

"Ah well, Ninon," I said, "have you taken a fancy to salt now, or do you fear that bonbons will make your teeth fall out?" and in saying that I tapped the box, which gave from under my vest the most honeyed and sugary sound in the world.

She put out her little tongue halfway on the side of her mouth as if to taste the ideal sweetness of the absent bonbons, but she did not budge. Then I drew the box from my pocket, opened it, and began to religiously swallow the burnt almonds which she loved above all. The greedy instinct was for an instant stronger than her resolution; she put out a hand to take some, but drew it back immediately, saying:

"I am too big to eat sweets," and she gave a sigh.

"I have not perceived that you have grown much since last week; you are like the mushrooms, then, which grow up in a night. Come, let me measure you."

"Laugh as much as you will," she replied, with a charming pout. "I am not a little girl, and I will become very big."

"These are excellent resolutions in which you must persevere, and might I be able to know, my dear young lady, for what purpose these magnificent ideas have entered your head? For a week ago you appeared to find it very nice being little, and cracked your almonds without otherwise harming or compromising your dignity."

The little person regarded me with a singular air, moved her eyes around her, and when she was well assured that no one could hear us, she leaned towards me in a mysterious manner and said:

"I have a lover."

"The deuce! I am no longer astonished that you will not have any more sweets; you have, however, done wrong in not taking some; you might have played at dining with him or exchanged them for a shuttlecock."

The child made a disdainful movement with her shoulders and appeared to have a look of perfect pity for me as she resumed the attitude of an offended queen. I continued:

"What is the name of this glorious personage? Arthur, I suppose, or Henry," these being two little boys with whom she was in the habit of playing, and which she called her husbands.

"No, neither Arthur nor Henry," she said, fixing upon me her clear, transparent eyes, "a gentleman." She raised her hand above her head to give me an idea of his height.

"As tall as that? But this is serious. Who then is this tall lover?"

"Monsieur Theodore, I will tell you, but you must not speak about it to any one, neither to mamma nor to Polly (her governess) or to your friends, who, thinking me a child, would make fun of me."

I promised her the most inviolable secrecy, for I was very curious to know who this gallant personage was, and the

child, seeing that I was treating the thing jocularly, hesitated to give me her entire confidence. Reassured by the word of honor that I gave her to be discreetly silent about it, she left her armchair, came and leant over the back of mine, and whispered very softly in my ear the name of the dear prince. I was confounded. It was the chevalier of G., a dirty-minded animal with the morals of a schoolmaster and the physique of a drummajor, one of the most intemperate debauched men it was possible to see, a true satyr without the feet of the goat and the pointed ears. That inspired me with serious fears for dear Ninon, and I promised myself that I would put the matter in good order.

Some people came in, and the conversation was stopped. I retired into a corner and sought in my head a way of hindering the thing from going farther, for it would have been a veritable disaster for such a delicious creature to fall into the hands of such an arrant scoundrel. The mother of the little one was a kind of gay woman, much given to play, and keeping a gambling house and a sort of literary salon. People read bad verses there and lost good crowns which compensated. She had very little love for her daughter, who was to her in a manner a sort of living certificate of baptism which prevented her from falsifying her chronology. Besides, the girl was growing up, and her youthful charms gave rise to comparisons which were not to the advantage of her prototype, who was already showing signs of wear through the friction of years. The child was thus neglected and left without a defense to the attacks of the scoundrels frequenting the house. If her mother had occupied herself with her it would have most probably been only to gain by her youth, and make a profit of her innocence and beauty; in one fashion or another there was no doubt as to the fate awaiting her. That gave me pain, for she was a charming little creature, a pearl of the first water, who assuredly merited a better fate than to be lost in that infected slough. That idea touched me to the quick, and I resolved to take her at all costs from that frightful house. The first thing to do was to hinder the chevalier from pursuing his object. The way I found the best and most simple was to seek a quarrel with him and so

make him fight me, and I had the greatest trouble in the world to do so, for he is as cowardly as possible, and fears an encounter more than anything in the world. At last I said so many piquant things to him that he had to call me out, although much against his wish. I threatened also to have him thrashed by my footman if he did not make a better show. He knew well enough, however, how to hold his weapon, but fear troubled him to such an extent that our irons had hardly crossed before I found means to administer to him a pretty little thrust that sent him to bed for a fortnight. That satisfied me, for I had no desire to kill him, and I would much rather he lived to be hanged later on, a touching care for which he should have owed me more good-will. My rogue being extended between two sheets and duly bandaged, there remained only to persuade the child to leave the house, and this was not excessively difficult. I told her a tale about the disappearance of her lover, which gave her great anxiety. I said that he had gone off with an actress belonging to the company then at G.; that made her indignant, as you may imagine. But I consoled her by saying all sorts of ill of her chevalier, who was ugly, a drunkard, and already old, and ended by asking her if she would not like me better for her gallant. She replied that she would much, because I was more handsome and my clothes were new. That artlessness, spoken with enormous seriousness, made me laugh almost to tears. I raised the head of the child and succeeded so well that she decided to leave the house. A few bouquets, nearly as many kisses, and a pearl necklace that I gave her charmed her to an extent difficult to describe, and she assumed in the presence of her little friends a most laughable air of importance.

I had made a very rich and very elegant page's costume, not tight fitting, for I was not able to bring her away in girl's clothes, nor to put on woman's dress myself; for that I would not do. I bought her a little horse, quiet and easy to ride, and, yet, sufficiently good to follow my barb when it pleased me to go fast. Then I told the fair one to come down at dusk to the door and I would be there to take her. This she did very punctually; I found her keeping watch behind the half-opened door. I passed very near the house; she came out.

I gave her my hand; she rested her foot on the point of mine and jumped very lightly up behind me, for she had marvelous agility. I spurred my horse, and by seven or eight deserted lanes I found means of returning to my house without any one seeing us. I made her exchange her dress for her disguise, myself acting as her chambermaid. She made at first some objections and would dress herself alone, but I made her understand that would lose much time, and besides, being my mistress, it was not the least improper and that it was the practice between lovers. It wanted no more to convince her, and she gave in to circumstance with the best grace in the world. Her body was a little marvel of delicacy; her arms though a little thin, like those of all young girls, were of inexpressible sweetness of line, and her growing bosom gave such charming promise, that when more formed it would be quite incomparable. She had still all the graces of the child and already all the charm of the woman. She was in that adorable stage of transition from the little girl to the young girl, that fugitive and delicious epoch where the beauty is full of hope, and where each day, in place of taking something from your love, adds to it new perfections. Her costume suited her well, it gave her a little mutinous air which was very curious and amusing, and made her burst out laughing when I presented her the mirror to judge the effect of her toilette. I afterwards made her eat some biscuits soaked in Spanish wine in order to give her courage and make her better able to bear the fatigues of the road.

The horses were waiting all saddled in the court; she mounted hers with some deliberation, I bestrode the other, and we started. The night had completely fallen, and lights which occasionally appeared were being extinguished every moment, showing that the honest town of C. was virtuously occupied, as all country towns should be at the hour of nine. We were not able to go very fast, for Ninon was no better horsewoman than she should be, and when her horse began to trot she would cling with all her strength to his mane. However, on the following morning we were too far away to be overtaken, at least not without extreme diligence. But we were not pursued, or at least if we were it was in an

opposite direction to that we had followed. I was singularly attached to the little fair one; I had no longer you with me, my dear Graciosa, and I experienced the immense want of loving some one or something, of having a dog or a child to caress lovingly; Ninon was that to me. She slept in my bed and passed her little arms around my body to go to sleep. She believed most seriously she was my mistress, and had no doubt that I was a man. Her youth and extreme innocence kept her in that error, which I took care not to correct. The kisses that I gave her perfectly completed the illusion, for her ideas had not yet gone beyond that, and nothing so far had led her to suspect anything else. Besides, she was only partly deceived, and really there was the same difference between her and me as there is between me and the men. She was so transparent, so slender, so light, of so choice and delicate a nature that she was a woman even to me, who am myself a woman, and who looks like a Hercules beside her. I am tall and dark, she is short and fair; her features are so soft that they make mine appear almost hard and austere, and her voice is such a melodious warble that mine appears harsh compared with hers. A man would have broken her in morsels, and I always fear that the wind will carry her off some fine morning. I should like to enclose her in a box of cotton-wool and carry her suspended from my neck. You cannot imagine, my good friend, how much of grace and wit she has. Her delicious purrings, her childish caresses, her little ways and pretty manners are delightful; she is the most adorable creature on earth, and it would have been truly a pity had she remained with her unworthy mother. I took a malicious joy in stealing away that treasure from the rapacity of men. I was the griffin which hindered them from approaching her, and if I did not enjoy her myself at least no one else did—an idea always consoling, which is not in the power of the foolish detractors of egoism. I purposed to keep her in ignorance as long as possible, and to keep her near me until she would stay no longer, or until I had assured a safe place for her.

In her little boy's costume I took her in all my travels right and left. This kind of life pleased her singularly, and the

pleasure that she took in it helped to support the fatigues. Everywhere I was complimented on the exquisite beauty of my page, and I doubt not it gave rise in the minds of many to a suspicion exactly the opposite of the truth. Many persons tried to unravel the mystery, but I did not let the little one speak to anybody, and the curious were all disappointed. Every day I discovered in that amiable child some new quality which made me cherish her more and congratulate myself on the resolution I had taken. Assuredly men were not worthy of possessing her, and it would have been deplorable if so many charms of body and soul had been delivered to their brutal appetites and cynical depravity. A woman only could love her delicately and tenderly enough. One side of my character which could not have been developed in any other connection, was quite brought out in this adventure, that was the desire and inclination to afford protection, a virtue which is habitually the business of men. It would have displeased me if I had taken a lover, if he had given himself the air of defending me, for the reason that this is a care I love to take with the people that please me, and that my pride is found better suited with the first part than the second, although the second may be more agreeable. Also I felt pleased to give to my dear little one all the cares and protection possible, such as helping her on difficult roads, holding her bridle or stirrup, serving her at table, undressing and putting her to bed, defending her if any one insulted her, in short, doing for her all that the most passionate and attentive lover would do for an adored mistress. I insensibly lost the idea of my sex, though at the beginning I hardly remembered that I was a woman. I often only just escaped saying something that was not consistent with the dress I wore. Now this never happened; though when I write to you, who knows my secret, in confidence I sometimes keep an unnecessary virility in my adjectives. If I ever have a fancy to go and seek my skirts in the drawers, or where I may have left them, which I very much doubt, unless I become amorous of some young beau, I shall have a difficulty in losing these habits, and in place of being a woman disguised as a man, I shall have the appearance of a man disguised as a woman.

In truth, neither one nor the other of the two sexes are mine; I have not the imbecile submission, the timidity, or the insignificance of the woman; I have not the vices of men, their disgusting intemperance or their brutal inclinations. I am of a third sex, one that has as yet no name above or below, more defective or superior. I have the body and soul of a woman, the spirit and the strength of a man, and I have too much or not enough of either to be able to couple with one of them. O Graciosa, I shall never be able to love any one completely, man or woman. Something unsatiated is always grumbling within me, and the lover or the friend responds to only one side of my character. If I had a lover the feminine element in me would doubtless for some time dominate the male; but this would not last long, and I feel I should only be half contented. If I had a friend the idea of bodily voluptuousness would hinder me from tasting entirely the pure friendship of the soul, so that I know not where to stop and float perpetually from one to the other. My fancy would be to have both sexes in turn for satisfying this double nature—man to-day, woman to-morrow; for my lovers I should reserve my languorous tenderness, my submissive and devoted manners, my softest caresses, my little plaintive sighs, all that which is cattish and womanly in my character. Then with my mistresses I should be enterprising, bold, passionate, with aggressive manners, and my hat cocked over my ear in the style of a captain or adventurer. My nature thus would be entirely brought to light, and I should be perfectly happy, for true happiness consists of being able to develop freely in all directions and being all that one may be. But these are impossible things, and I must not dream. I had taken away the child with the idea of giving a change to my inclinations and directing upon some one all the vague tenderness which floats in my soul and inundates it; I had taken her as a sort of escapement for my loving faculties, but I soon recognized, in spite of all the loving affection I bore her, what an immense void, what a bottomless abyss she had left in my heart, and how little her most tender caresses satisfied me. I resolved on trying a lover, but a long time passed without my meeting a man who did not displease me.

I had forgotten to tell you that Rosette, having discovered where I was gone, had written me a most suppliant letter, begging me to go and see her. I was not able to refuse, and I rejoined her in the country where she was. I have returned there many times since, and quite lately Rosette, despairing of ever having me for a lover, has thrown herself into the whirlpool of society and dissipation, as do all tender souls who are not religious, when they are robbed of their first love. She had many adventures in a short time, and the list of her conquests was already very long, for every one had not the same reasons for resisting her as I had. She had with her a young man named d'Albert who was at that time her accepted lover. I appeared to make quite a particular impression on him and he took from the first a very strong liking to me. Although he treated her with much respect, and his manners were tender enough in the main towards her, he did not love Rosette, not from satiety or distaste, but rather because she did not respond to certain ideas, true or false, which he had formed of love and beauty. An ideal phantom interposed between her and him, and hindered him from being as happy as he would have been without it. Evidently his dream was not accomplished, and he sighed after something else. But he did not seek it, and remained faithful to the bonds that weighed upon him, for he has more delicacy in his soul than most men, and his heart is very far from being as corrupt as his mind. Not knowing that Rosette had ever been in love except with me, and that she was so still, and notwithstanding all her intrigues and follies, he feared to grieve her by letting her see that he did not love her, and out of consideration, sacrificed himself in the most generous manner possible. The beauty of my features pleased him extraordinarily, for he attached an extreme importance to external form. So much so that he became amorous of me in spite of my man's attire and the formidable rapier that I carried by my side. I avow that I admired him for the fineness of his instinct, and that I felt for him some esteem for having penetrated through my disguise. In the beginning he believed himself cursed with a most depraved taste, though in effect he was not, and I laughed inwardly to

see him thus torment himself. He had sometimes, when speaking to me, a frightened look which very much amused me, and the natural inclination he felt towards me appeared to him a diabolical impulse which should be strongly resisted. On these occasions he would fall back upon Rosette with fury, and endeavor to correct himself with more orthodox love-making; then he would return to me more strongly attracted than before. Then the luminous idea that I might be a woman glided into his mind. To convince himself of this he set himself to observe and study me with the most minute attention. He must know each particular hair, also how many I have on my eyelids, my feet, hands, neck, cheeks, even the down at the corner of my lips; he has examined, compared, and analyzed them all, and from that investigation, in which the artist aided the lover, it seemed clear as the day (when it is clear) that I was well and duly a woman, and moreover his ideal; his type of beauty, the reality of his dream. Marvelous discovery!

It only remained to move me to pity, and grant the gift of amorous mercy, to prove entirely my sex. A comedy which we played, and in which I appeared as a woman, completely decided him. I cast him a few equivocal glances, and made use of some passages in my part analogous to our situation to embolden him and make him to declare himself. For if I did not love him passionately he pleased me well enough to prevent me from leaving him to die of a broken heart; and as he was the first since my transformation to have any suspicion that I was a woman, it was quite right that I should enlighten him on this important point, and I was resolved not to leave him the shadow of a doubt. He came many times into my room with his declaration on his lips, but dared not utter it; for really it is difficult to speak of love to some one who is dressed like yourself and is putting on riding-boots. At last, not being able to take upon himself to speak, he wrote me a very long, very Pindaric letter, in which he explained to me at great length that I knew better than he did. I do not quite know what I ought to do; admit his request or reject it. The latter would be immoderately virtuous, besides his grief at being refused would be too great. If we make unhappy the

people we love what shall we do to those we hate? Perhaps it would be strictly more becoming to be cruel for a time, and to wait at least a month before unfastening the tigress's skin and putting humanity into a chemise.

But since I have resolved to yield to him, at once is as good as later on; I do not think much of these fine mathematical resistances in which one hand is surrendered to-day, another to-morrow, then the foot, then the leg, and the knee as far as the garter, nor of those intractable virtues always ready to pull the bell if you overstep the mark which they have fixed for the day. It makes me laugh to see those methodical Lucretias walking backwards with signs of the most virginal fright, and throwing from time to time a furtive look over their shoulder, to assure themselves that the sofa where they must fall is directly behind them. That is a precaution I could never take. I do not love d'Albert, at least in the sense that I give to that word; but I have certainly a liking and inclination for him; his wit pleases me, and his person does not repel me. There are not many men of whom I can say as much. He has not all, but he has something. What pleases me in him, is that he does not seek to satiate himself brutally like other men; he has a perpetual aspiration and an ever sustained longing for the beautiful, towards material beauty only it is true, but it is still a noble inclination, and one which is sufficient to keep him in pure regions. His conduct with Rosette proves his honesty of heart, honesty more rare than the other if it is possible; and then, if I must tell you, I am possessed with the most violent desires. I languish and I die of voluptuousness, for the dress I wear, while engaging me in all sorts of adventures with women, protects me only too perfectly against the enterprises of men. An idea which I never realize floats vaguely in my head, and that insipid and colorless dream fatigues and wearies me. Many women placed amidst the most chaste lead the lives of courtesans, and I, by a funny contrast, remain virgin and chaste as the cold Diana herself, in the midst of the widest dissipation and surrounded by the greatest debauchees of the age. This bodily ignorance, unaccompanied by ignorance of the mind, is the most miserable thing possible. So that my flesh shall not

pride itself over my spirit I will profane it equally, if it is a greater profanation than eating or drinking, which I very much doubt. In a word, I will find out everything there is to be learned. Since d'Albert has recognized me under my disguise, it is very just that he should be rewarded for his penetration. He is the first to divine that I was a woman, and I shall do my best to prove to him that his suspicions were well founded. It would be most uncharitable to let him believe that he had a monstrous taste. It is d'Albert then who will solve my doubts and give me my first lesson in love. I shall agitate no further now, but bring about the climax in a poetic manner. I am inclined not to reply to his letter, and to look coldly on him for some days when I see him very sad and despairing, inveighing against the gods, shaking his fist at creation, and regarding the wells, to see if they are not too deep to throw himself into them. I shall throw my ass's skin to the end of the corridor and put on my cultured robe, that is to say my costume as Rosalind, for my feminine wardrobe is very restricted. Then I shall go to him, radiant as a peacock with outspread tail, showing that which I ordinarily conceal with great care, and wearing only a little circlet of lace round my throat, very low and very loose, and say to him in the most pathetic tone that I am able to assume, "O very elegiac and perspicacious young man, I am truly a young and modest beauty who adores you into the bargain, and who desires to share her pleasures with you. See if that suits you, and if you have still any scruples, touch this, go in peace, and sin the most that you can." This fine discourse ended, I shall let myself fall half-swooning into his arms, uttering melancholy sighs; I shall adroitly let the hook of my dress become unfastened in a manner that will leave me in strict costume, that is to say, in part nude. D'Albert will do the rest, and I hope that the next morning I shall know all about those fine things that I have troubled my brain for a long time. In satisfying my curiosity I shall have, moreover, the pleasure of making one happy. I also propose to go and pay Rosette a visit in the same dress, and let her see that if I have not responded to her love it is not from coldness or distaste. I do not wish her to hold a bad opinion of me, and she deserves

as much as d'Albert that I should betray my disguise in her favor. What a look of surprise she will assume at the revelation! Her pride will be consoled, but her love will lament. Good-by, all beautiful and all good; pray the good God that I may not think as little of the pleasure as those that bestow it. I have joked all through this long letter, and yet what I am going to undertake is a serious thing, which I may feel for the rest of my life.

CHAPTER XVI

It was now more than a fortnight since d'Albert had deposited his amorous epistle on Theodore's table, and still there seemed no change in the latter's attitude. D'Albert was at a loss to understand this silence. Had his precious epistle gone astray or got lost? This seemed hardly likely, for Theodore had returned to his room directly after, and it would indeed have been extraordinary had he failed to perceive a great paper lying by itself in the middle of the table in a manner to attract the attention of even the most unobservant. Or was it that d'Albert was entirely mistaken and Theodore was really a man, or, in case she were a woman, had she so pronounced a feeling of contempt that she did not deign to give herself the trouble to reply?

Unlike ourselves, our dear d'Albert had not the advantage of perusing the correspondence of Graciosa, the confidante of the beautiful de Maupin, so he was not in a position to decide affirmatively or negatively any of these important questions, and he fluctuated sadly in the most miserable irresolution.

One evening he was in his room, his forehead leaning sadly against the windowpane, looking gloomily at the chestnut trees in the park, the leaves of which were already reddening and dropping. A thick mist obscured the horizon, and the deepening twilight only served to increase his misery. A large swan plunging his long neck into the streaming water

of the river was the only visible living thing which animated a little the gloomy landscape. D'Albert was dreaming as sadly as any man may dream at five o'clock in the evening in the dusk of autumn, a disappointed man, a sharp north wind for his music, and the skeleton of a leafless forest for his outlook. He thought of throwing himself into the river, but the water seemed very black and very cold. Having no pistol, shooting himself was out of the question. In despair, he went so far as to wish to resume his acquaintance with women who were perfectly insupportable to him, and whom he should have had whipped out of his house by his servants. He finished by deciding upon something still more terrible—the writing of a second letter. O threefold idiot!

He was in the midst of these meditations when he felt a hand placed on his shoulder like a little dove alighting upon a palm tree—the comparison limps a little, inasmuch as d'Albert's shoulder bears little resemblance to a palm tree. Still, we will conserve the pure Orientalism. The hand was joined to an arm attached to a shoulder which formed part of the body of none other than Theodore, Rosalind, Mademoiselle d'Aubigny, or Madalaine de Maupin, to call her by her true name. We, who fully anticipated such a visit, are not in the least astonished, but d'Albert, who had no inkling of it, gave vent to a little cry of surprise. Here was indeed Rosalind, so beautiful and so radiant that she lit up all the rooms with the strings of pearls in her hair, her prismatic dress with the lace front, her red-heeled shoes, and her handsome fan of peacock's plumes, in short, such as she was on the day of the performance. Only, and this difference was important and decisive, she wore neither scarf, ruff, nor anything that would hide from view her perfect figure. A beautiful bosom, white and smooth as the purest marble, boldly projected beyond her low-cut dress.

“Ah well, Orlando; do you not recognize your Rosalind, or have you left your love hanging with your sonnets on some bushes in the forest of Arden? Are you yet cured of the passion which you vowed that I alone had power to assuage? I am afraid you are.”

"Oh no, Rosalind, I am worse than ever. I am in agony; I am dead, or very near it."

"You look exceedingly well for a dead man. Many living ones look much worse."

"What a week I have passed! You cannot imagine it, Rosalind. I hope it may be reckoned of equal value to a thousand years of purgatory in another world. But if I dare, may I ask why you have not replied to me sooner?"

"Why? I hardly know, unless it was because I did not. However, if this does not appear to you, a valid motive, here are three others, much worse, from which you may choose. First, carried away by your passion, you did not write legibly, so that it has taken me more than a week to make out what was in your letter; next, because my modesty would not allow me in less time to nurture such an absurd idea as that of taking a dithyrambic poet for my lover; and then, because I was anxious to see if you would attempt to blow out your brains and hang yourself with your garters. There!"

"Oh! do not jest; I assure you that you have done well in coming to-day. You might not have found me to-morrow."

"Really, poor boy? Do not assume such a sorrowful, weeping air, for it affects me also, and if once I loose the floodgates of my sensibility, I warn you you will be completely submerged. Just now I gave you three bad reasons. I now offer you three good kisses. There!"

Her debt discharged, and still greatly moved, she sat down on d'Albert's knee, and passing her fingers through his hair, she said to him:

"All my cruelties are exhausted, my sweet friend. I have taken this fortnight to satisfy my ferocity. Perhaps I found it as long as you. Do not become conceited because of my frankness, but that is true. I do not demand of you an oath of eternal love, nor any exaggerated protestations. Love me as much as the good God wills. That is all I ask. I will do as much on my side. I will not call you a perfidious wretch when you love me no more; and you will have the goodness to spare me the corresponding odious titles. If I should happen to leave you I shall only be a woman that has ceased to love you; nothing more. It is not necessary to hate me all

through life because of one or two love passages. Whatever may happen, and wherever destiny may drive me, I swear to you, and this is a promise that one may keep, that I will always have a charming remembrance of you; and if I am no more your mistress, I shall be your friend, as I have been your comrade. For you I have put aside this night my manly dress. I shall resume it to-morrow for good. Dream that I am Rosalind at night. All the day I am and can only be Theodore de Sérannes."

Any further utterance was checked by a long kiss which d'Albert planted full on her lips, followed by others too numerous to count. As the earnest entreaties of d'Albert became more tender and more pressing, the beautiful features of Theodore, instead of being blooming and radiant, took an expression of proud melancholy which gave her lover much uneasiness.

"Why, my dear sovereign, have you the chaste and serious air of an antique Diana, when it would be much better to have the smiling lips of Venus rising from the sea?"

"My dear d'Albert, it is because I am more like the huntress Diana than anything else. I had taken when very young the dress of a man, for some reasons it would be tedious and useless to tell you. You alone have divined my sex, and if I have made conquests they have been over women; very superfluous conquests they have been, and more than once most embarrassing. In a word, I have always preserved my virginity, and that is why I am sad, now that I feel that I may not be able to give to-morrow that which I had to-day."

As she spoke, she parted with two beautiful hands the young man's long hair, and pressed upon his pale forehead her soft lips. D'Albert, singularly moved by the soft and solemn tone in which she had spoken, took her hands and kissed all the fingers one after the other, then very delicately broke the lacing of her dress, so that the corsage opened, the two white treasures appearing in all their splendor.

Filled with a new passion, d'Albert clasped her in his arms, covering with kisses her shoulders and bosom. The hair of the half-swooning girl became loosened, and her dress fell at her feet as by enchantment. She remained quite upright, like

a white apparition. The enchanted lover knelt down, and had soon thrown, each into an opposite corner of the apartment, the two pretty little shoes with red heels, while the embroidered stockings followed very closely.

She thus remained without any covering, in all the transparent luster of her beautiful body, in the soft light of an alabaster lamp that d'Albert had lighted, her fallen clothing looking like a sort of stand.

The young enthusiast for beauty was not able to satisfy his eyes on a spectacle like this, for we must say, to the immense praise of Rosalind, that this time the reality was above the dream, and he did not experience the slightest disappointment. Everything was united in the beautiful body which posed before him—delicacy and strength, form and color, the lines of a Greek statue of the best era, and the tone of a Titian. He saw there, palpable and crystallized, the cloudy fancy that he had many times vainly striven to halt in its flight. He was not forced, in the manner he used to complain of so bitterly to his friend Silvio, to confine his gaze to one part, well enough formed, not passing beyond it on pain of seeing something frightful, and his amorous eye descended from the head to the feet, ascended from the feet to the head, always sweetly endeared by a correct and harmonious form. The knees were admirably pure, the ankles elegant and fine, the legs and thighs of a proud and superb turn, the body glossy as an agate, the hips supple and powerful, the bosom would make the gods come down from heaven to kiss arms and shoulders of the most magnificent character. A torrent of beautiful brown hair, lightly crisped, such as one sees on the heads painted by old masters, fell in little waves along an ivory back of which it marvelously heightened the whiteness.

The painter satisfied, the lover resumed the ascendancy, for though one has some love of art, there are things that one cannot merely look for any length of time satisfactorily.

He raised the beauty in his arms and carried her to the bed.

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Instead of returning to her own room Rosalind went straight to that of Rosette. What she said there and what

she did I have never been able to find out, although I have made the most conscientious inquiries. I have not found anything either in the papers of Graciosa or in those belonging to d'Albert and Silvio relating to that visit. Only a maid of Rosette apprised me of a singular circumstance. It was that her mistress had not slept that night with her lover; but the bed was disturbed and had been used, and bore the impression of two bodies; and, moreover, she showed me two pearls, perfectly resembling those which Theodore wore in his hair when acting in the part of Rosalind. She had found these in making the bed. I leave this remark to the sagacity of the reader and leave him to draw what inferences he will. As to myself, I have made above a thousand conjectures, all most unreasonable, each and all so absurd that I truly dare not write them even in the most virtuously periphrastic style. It was well towards midday when Theodore left Rosette's room. He did not appear either at dinner or supper. D'Albert and Rosette did not appear surprised at this. He went to bed in good time, and the following morning, as soon as it was daylight, without informing any one, saddled his horse and that of his page and left the castle, telling a footman that they were not to wait dinner for him, and that he might not perhaps return for some days. D'Albert and Rosette were very much astonished, not knowing to what to attribute this strange disappearance, d'Albert above all, for he thought that his prowess of the first night had entitled him to a second. At the end of the week the unhappy, disappointed lover received a letter from Theodore which we shall transcribe. I much fear that it will not satisfy my readers, male or female, but in truth the letter was written thus and not otherwise, and this glorious romance shall have no other conclusion.

"You are no doubt greatly surprised, my dear d'Albert, at what has transpired. After doing what I have done, I will permit you to be so, for you have the right. You have already given me at least twenty of those epithets that we were agreed should be erased from our vocabulary, perfidious, inconstant, villainous. Is it not so? At least you will not call me virtuous, or cruel, and that will be something gained. You curse me and you are wrong. You had an inclination for me,

I was your ideal; very well. I accorded to you at once what you desired. You might have had it much sooner. I served as body for your dream, with the readiest complaisance in the world. I gave you that which I shall assuredly not give to any one again, a surprise on which you hardly counted, and, knowing which, should have your good will. Now that I have satisfied you, it pleases me to go away. What is there so monstrous in this? You have had me entirely and without reserve all one night. What would you have more? Another night, and then yet another. You would even want the days. You would continue this way till you were disgusted with me. I can hear you from here crying out most gallantly that I am not one of those which disgust you. But it would be the same with me as the others. It may last six months, two years, ten years, if you will, but the end always must come. You would keep me from sentiments of propriety, or perhaps because you would not have the courage to dismiss me. What good is it to wait for that end? And then perhaps I might cease to love you. I have found you charming. Perhaps by dint of seeing you I should find you become detestable. Pardon me this supposition. In living with you in great intimacy, I should without doubt have occasion to see you in a cotton cap, or in some funny or ridiculous domestic situation. You would necessarily lose the romantic and mysterious side that seduced me above all things, and your character, better understood, would no longer appear strange to me. I should be less occupied with you if I had you near me, in the same way that we treat books which we never open because we have them in our libraries. Your nose or your wit would not seem as well turned. I should perceive that your coat was ill-fitting or that your hose were untidy. I should have a thousand awakenings of this kind which would have singularly pained me, and at the end I should have arrived at the conclusion that you had neither heart nor soul, and that I was destined to be misunderstood in love. You adore me and I you. You have not the slightest reproach to make me, and I have not the least complaint in the world to make against you. I have been particularly faithful to you all throughout our amour. I have deceived you in nothing. I had neither

false bosom nor false virtue; you had the extreme goodness to say that I was more beautiful than you had imagined because of the beauty I gave you. You gave me much pleasure. We are quits. I go my way, you go yours. Perhaps we may meet again at the Antipodes. Live in that hope.

"You believe perhaps that I do not love you because I leave you. You will recognize the truth of this later on. If I had done less in your case I should have remained, and would have poured out the insipid beverage to the dregs. Your love would have soon expired from weariness; after some time you would quite have forgotten me, and reading my name over in the list of your conquests, you would have asked, who on earth was this? I have at least the satisfaction of thinking that you will remember me rather than another. Your unsatisfied desire opens still its wings to fly to me. I shall be always something desirable to you, where your fancy loves to return, and I hope that in the bed of any mistresses you may have, you will sometimes dream of that one night you passed with me. You never will be more amiable than you were on that very happy evening, and at the same time, if you were, it would really be somewhat less, for in love as in poetry to remain at the same point is to go back. Hold to that impression; you will do well. You have made the task of the lovers, I may have a difficult one (if I have other lovers), and no one will be able to efface your remembrance. They shall be the heirs of Alexander. If you grieve too much at losing me burn this letter, which is the sole proof that you have had me, and you will believe you have had a beautiful dream. What hinders you? The vision has vanished before the day, at the time when dreams return home by the horn or ivory gate. How many are dead who, less happy than you, have not given even one kiss to their ideal. I am not capricious, nor mad, nor a conceited prude. My action is the result of profound conviction. It is not to inflame you more or from calculated coquetry that I have departed from C. Do not try to follow me or find me again. You will not succeed. My precautions to conceal myself from you are too well taken. You will always be to me the man who opened up for me a world of new sensations. These are things that

a woman does not easily forget. Although absent I think of you often, more often than if you were with me. Console to the best of your ability poor Rosette, who must be as sorry for my departure as you are. Love well, both of you, and remember me whom you both loved, and sometimes speak my name in a kiss."

THE END









